

ALONG THE COLOR LINE

CLASS, PASSING, AND THE CONSTRUCT OF

COLORISM IN DU BOIS' *CRISIS MAGAZINE*,

1910-1934

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Introduction

The American Negro is accused of being without group pride. This illusion is derived from the fact that he is not a bigot about his color and features. And for good reason he is not: because he has all the colors and features within his group. Physically the colored American represents the most cosmopolitan group of humans in the world. If he is to boast of his features, of which one must he boast? How can a group with every color known to nature, say: "I am proud of my color"? "Of which 'color'"?¹

This quote is an excerpt from a 1922 edition of *The Crisis Magazine: A Record of the Darker Races*. The matter of discrimination based on color has been a subject of contention within the Black or African American community for as long as there has been an African American "racial" group. Stemming from racial constructs created during the creation of the transatlantic, discrimination or differentiation based on skin tone would, from the times of slavery until the present, remain a very important recurrent theme in the African American community.

To gain a deeper understanding of the historical foundation of this discrimination it is necessary to look at American history as a whole. As historian Barbara J. Fields and other scholars such as sociologist Theresa J. Guess have pointed out, the idea of race did not precede slavery but followed it, created as a means to justify the subjugation of the previously indentured African servants, and a new racial hierarchy where "white" was above "black". This would mean that these new practices based on a new racial hierarchy meant to solidify the practice of slavery were nothing but "historical products of human activity."² And even the categorization of white and black appeared to be different. As Fields argues, Americans of European descent unlike African Americans have never been assigned to biological categories based on the "one drop rule", making any person with "one

¹ *The Crisis Magazine: A Record for the Darker Races*, Vol. 24, No. 6. (Oct 1922), 285.

² Theresa J. Guess, 'The Social Construction of Whiteness: Racism by Intent, Racism by Consequence', *Critical Sociology* 32:4 (2006), 656-657, and Barbara J. Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America", *New Left Review*, May 1, 1990, Vol.0 (181), 106-115.

drop” of “black blood” black, or the “any-known-ancestry-rule”.³ What follows is that any person mixed with “black” became African American, even those who had nearly no black ancestors at all. From the hierarchy of “race” came into existence another hierarchy within this carefully constructed Black American community. This new hierarchy would be based on “color”. As Theresa J. Guess writes:

further, and equally damaging, is that among most descendants of the formerly enslaved, there continues to exist a social hierarchy based on skin color ... the myth of the light-complected people implying something better than, or above, dark complected people.⁴

Those of lighter complexion, separated in status even before the abolition of slavery by their different racial status as black mulatto instead of merely black, thus came to stand above other African Americans. This became visible initially in the “lighter tasks” those of lighter complexion were given, including the position of house slaves, opportunities to acquire trade skills and other useful education, and generally more freedom to move within the plantation in comparison to their fellow slaves of darker complexion who were generally forced to work in the fields. As sociologist Robert L. Reece points out, however, the advantages of a light complexion also had a further reach with mulattos because of their mixed heritage and connections to the white population and white slaveowners, so disproportionately represented among the free black population that in some areas “free black” and “mulatto” “almost became synonymous”.⁵ Advantages gained in times of slavery

³ Barbara J. Fields, “Whiteness, Racism, and Identity”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 60 (Fall, 2001), 50. Also read: Michael Banton, “Race as a Social Category.” *Race* VIII:1 (1966), Ronald E. Hall, “The Globalization of Light Skin Colorism: From Critical Race to Critical Skin Theory.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 62, no. 14 (December 2018), 2133–45, Karen E. Fields and Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*, (London: Verso, 2012), Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (5th ed. edition. Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1993).

⁴ Guess, “The Social Construction of Whiteness”, 671.

⁵ Robert L., Reece, “Genesis of U.S. Colorism and Skin Tone Stratification: Slavery, Freedom, and Mulatto-Black Occupational Inequality in the Late 19th Century”, *The Review of Black Political Economy* 45, no. 1 (March 2018), 8.

continued well after the abolition of slavery, and the educational, financial, and social lead granted to this social group would not only allow the mulatto's of lighter complexion to remain the dominant beauty ideal within the Black American community, but also provided all the advantages for this group to subsequently form the African American middle class.

Although this discrimination based on skin tone thus has been interwoven with African American history and has deeply influenced the African American community, no formal naming of the concept and acknowledgement existed until recent history. It was not until Alice Walker in her essay "If the Present Looks Like the Past, What Does the Future Look Like?" created a name for the phenomenon as late as 1983 that the issue would move itself into the mainstream. "Colorism" would become the term to refer to any prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a darker skin tone within the same ethnic group, and it is "colorism" which this thesis seeks to further analyze.⁶

Analyzing issues of the *Crisis Magazine: A Record for the Darker Races*, the official magazine for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), when under the leadership of W.E.B Dubois, will lead to a greater understanding not only of the construction of "colorism" in *The Crisis Magazine*, but also the different factors it intersects with such as class, of gender in the case of African American women and the construction of femininity and the ideas of prominent civil rights leader and scholar W.E.B Du Bois. This leads to the main question this thesis seeks to answer: In what way is the construct of "colorism" for African American women represented in the imagery and writings of the *Crisis Magazine* from 1910 until 1934?

This thesis will analyze issues from the *Crisis Magazine* running from 1910 until 1934 because it was then that the magazine was founded, and later led by renowned Civil Rights leader and editor-in-chief W.E.B. Dubois. From its conception and throughout this period, *The Crisis* would

⁶ Alice Walker , *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1983; London: Orion Publishing Group, 2011) , 233.

remain a reflection of Dubois' personal beliefs.⁷ As Dubois wrote in *Dusk of Dawn*, "I determined to make the opinion of the *Crisis* a personal opinion; because, as I argued, no organization can express definite and clear cut opinions". Dubois also believed that it was for this reason that the publication became as popular as it did, asserting that if "the *Crisis* had not been in a sense a personal organ and the expression of myself, it could not possibly have attained its popularity and effectiveness".⁸ The journal, aimed at "a literate negro public"⁹, soon after its founding became an essential magazine in the lives of many middle-class Black Americans.

Located in New York, the magazine had a readership which started out at roughly one thousand at its first publication in 1910 to a few thousand within just a few months, and later expanded throughout the years to more than one hundred thousand in 1919.¹⁰ Its focus was not only restricted to civil and women's rights and the every day lives of Black Americans, but it also portrayed a new image of African Americans geared towards countering the racial stereotypes and caricaturization which had been prevalent in American print in general and advertising in particular. This thesis will investigate to what extent this new portrayal included Black Americans, and specifically Black American women, of all shades of skin tones, will become elucidated in this thesis. The fact that *The Crisis* is a prominent African American civil rights magazine, defending the rights of all Black American women and men, further underscores the deep roots and the contradictory character of "colorism" within the African American community. Furthermore, the fact that the source material is almost entirely made up of issues of the magazine and writings by Du Bois makes this study one of the most exhaustive and extensive examinations of the *Crisis Magazine*, one which will add greatly to the current historiography on both W.E.B Du Bois and the journal.

⁷ Rudwick, Elliott M., "W. E. B. Du Bois in the Role of Crisis Editor", *The Journal of Negro History* 43 (July 1958), 214.

⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, (San Diego: Harcourt, 1940; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 146.

⁹ Rudwick, "W. E. B. Du Bois in the Role of Crisis Editor", 214.

¹⁰ Amy Helene Kirschke and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, *Protest and Propaganda: W. E. B. Du Bois, the CRISIS, and American History* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2019), 19.

As the concept of “colorism” is highly abstract, it is important to set forth the parameters for this research. Covers and advertisements in the *Crisis* will form the primary basis of source material. The women on the covers of the magazine generally are meant to represent dominant beauty ideals in order to entice readers to purchase the magazine, and advertisements are interesting because they are meant to “sell” certain products accompanying dominant beauty ideals to readers of the magazine.¹¹ Among these advertisements are wig advertisements and advertisements for cosmetic and hair products. The imagery on both the covers and in the advertisements will thus clarify the dominant beauty ideals of middle-class African Americans during the 1910s and 1920s and part of the 1930s. The focus of this study will be on women in particular because it is women who are most heavily influenced and most impacted by the construct of “colorism”. It is women who are most influenced by the dominant beauty ideals within a society and as research has proven, it is African American women in particular who are victims of “colorism” in the African American community, because of the association of light skin with ideals of beauty and femininity.¹² To be able to concretely study instances of “colorism”, it is key to divide women portrayed in the imagery of the *Crisis* into three separate groups. For this I have chosen to follow the terminology used by Lilly M. Fears, in her study of “Black Women in News Editorial Photos” where Fears divides women into two groups: those with “Afrotypic” appearance, which is “characterized by dark skin, a broad nose, full lips, and ‘kinky’ hair”¹³, and those with “Eurotypic” appearance, which is characterized by lighter complexion, often less coily, straighter hair and other “Eurotypic” features such as a “smaller” nose and lips. A third category I have added is that of those women who do not

¹¹ For more on advertising and the creation of a modern consumption culture in the 1920s, read: Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (First edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), Richard S. Tedlow, *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America* (Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), Daniel Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising*. (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

¹² Stevie Watson, Corliss G. Thornton, eds., “Skin Color Shades in Advertising to Ethnic Audiences: The Case of African Americans.” *Journal of Marketing Communications* 16, no. 4 (September 2010), 186.

¹³ Lilly M. Fears, “Black Women in News Editorial Photos”, *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 22:1 (1998), 30.

possess any features or skin tone commonly connected to the African American ethnic group, and who are therefore able to “pass” for white.

As the study of “colorism” is connected to both the fields of sociology and history, I will use literature from both fields. And although this thesis remains in the field of history, I will draw on works by both sociologists and historians. No one more clearly personifies the close connection between the two disciplines in the field of race and “colorism” studies than W.E.B. Du Bois himself, who with his *Souls of Black Folks: Essays and Sketches* (1903) created a seminal work in the field of sociology. It is in this work that Du Bois first discusses the problem of the color line, stating that “the problem of the twentieth century” was “the color-line, -- the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.”¹⁴ What Du Bois referred to was not a color line within any ethnic or “racial” community, but of one between “races”. It is the color line within the African American community, however, that this thesis, seeks to analyze.

Apart from these two fields of history and sociology this study is also influenced by two other interdisciplinary theories in the social sciences: Critical Race Theory, a theoretical framework which theorizes, examines and challenges “the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices and discourses”, and Whiteness Studies, a field focused on analyzing the social construction and the ideology of whiteness. Just as with the field of sociology, Du Bois’ works on “race” and the problem of the color-line have also been precursors to these two fields.

As the study of “colorism” is a fairly new discipline in the field of history, this thesis will add to the current historiography by deepening the understanding of “colorism” through the study of a

¹⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*. (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Company, 1903; New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994), 13.

highly important black news journal in the early twentieth century.¹⁵ Examining the visual imagery specifically will allow for a fresh analysis, dissecting the construct of “colorism” in connection to W.E.B. Du Bois, the African American middle class and ideals of beauty and femininity for African American women in the period from 1910-1934. This thesis is not the first study of the covers of the *Crisis* magazine. A recent essay on a similar subject was published in February of 2019 in a volume titled *Protest and Propaganda: W. E. B. Du Bois, the Crisis, and American History*. The essay titled “The Crisis Cover Girl: Lena Horne, Walter White, and the NAACP’s Representation of African American Femininity” by Gender studies scholar Megan Williams aims to study light-skinned actress Lena Horne as she is represented on the covers of the *Crisis Magazine* during the World War II era. In this essay, Williams briefly examines the several covers featuring actress Lena Horne in the period between 1940 and 1945 and connects them to the NAACP’s middle class ideals of femininity. Although the essay does provide interesting context, both the fact that it deals with a period that is a decade later and the limited scope of the article make this thesis in particular a valuable addition to the current scholarship on the *Crisis* in general and the light-complexioned women on the covers in particular. Furthermore, although other historians such as Amy Helene Kirschke have written a great deal on Du Bois and his role as editor of the *Crisis* in for example *Protest and Propaganda* and “Dubois and *The Crisis*’ Magazine: Imaging Women and Family,”¹⁶ a study of the visual images in the *Crisis* will add to a deepened understanding not only of Dubois and his ideas, but also on those beauty ideals of the African American (middle-class) community during the Harlem Renaissance, or New Negro Movement. A study of the *Crisis Magazine* during the period of 1910 until in 1934 is highly important not only because it was in this period that Du Bois was editor-in-chief of the magazine he founded, his editorship also coincides with the Harlem

¹⁵ Examples of other (non-historical) studies of “colorism” in magazine imagery are: Donna T. Mayo, Charles. M. Mayo, eds., “Skin Tones in Magazine Advertising”, *Journal of Promotion Management* Vol 11 (2-3), 49- 59, Fears, “Colorism of Black Women in News Editorial Photos”, 30-36, Stevie Watson, Corliss G. Thornton, eds., “Skin color shades in advertising to ethnic audiences”, 185-201, Kimberly Jade, *Color Matters: Skin Tone Bias and the Myth of a Postracial America* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

¹⁶ Kirschke and Sinitiere. *Protest and Propaganda*, and Amy Helene Kirschke, “Dubois and *The Crisis* Magazine: Imaging Women and Family”, *Notes in the History of Art*, Vol. 24 No. 4, (Summer 2005), 35-45.

Renaissance or New Negro Movement, a period highly important not only for its artistic expressions exemplified in the poetry, literature and fine art created during the Movement, but above all for creating a new sense of agency connected to the idea of the “New Negro”.¹⁷ No longer subjected to the negative stereotypes imposed upon African Americans, the “New Negro”, manifested in both literature and visual arts, was to become a full human being, leaving behind the mere caricatures of Black Americans in the dominant culture.

In order to analyze the construct of “colorism” through the visual images of the *Crisis*, it is important to study the different themes it intersects with. As the *Crisis* continued under the leadership of W.E.B. Du Bois from its conception until 1934, and reflected the civil rights leader’s personal beliefs, it is therefore important to first study W.E.B. Du Bois and his role as editor-in-chief of the *Crisis*. It is this subject the first chapter will focus on, by answering the following question: In what way were W.E.B. Du Bois’ ideas and notions on “race”, color and women expressed in the *Crisis Magazine*? The second chapter will discuss the African American middle class and its literary focus on “passing” in the early twentieth century,: How did notions of class and race influence the creation and nature of passing stories in the *Crisis* during the Harlem Renaissance or New Negro Movement? And the last chapter shall focus specifically on “colorism” of African American women in imagery of the magazine, addressing the following question: In what way does the imagery of black women in the *Crisis Magazine*, represented on both the covers and in the advertisements in the magazine, demonstrate a preference for lighter complexion, or “colorism”?

As I will demonstrate in analyzing the source material throughout this paper, “colorism” was, voluntarily or not, during the period of 1910 until 1934 a strong feature of not only Du Bois’ ideas, which were reflected in the *Crisis*, but also of the African American middle class in general.

¹⁷ Also see: Eric King Watts, *Hearing the Hurt: Rhetoric, Aesthetics, and Politics of the New Negro Movement* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), Cheryl A. Wall, *The Harlem Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, ed. *A Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, (1 edition. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), Cary D Wintz, eds, *The Politics and Aesthetics of “New Negro” Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

Although the *Crisis* was specifically a civil rights magazine connected to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People which was meant to speak for all Black Americans, this thus did not mean that the magazine did not represent and cater to a middle-class audience of generally lighter complexion. It is these apparent contradictions which make the *Crisis* a highly interesting case study, one in which a different color-line reveals itself. As Alice Walker writes in response to W.E.B Dubois:

the problem of the twenty-first century will still be the problem of the color line, not only “the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men [sic] in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea,” but the relations between the darker and lighter people of the same races, and of the women who represent both dark and light within each race.¹⁸

¹⁸ Alice Walker , *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*, 248.

1. W.E.B Du Bois and the creation of the *Crisis*

He said: “I met two children —one as fair as the dawn—the other as beautiful as the night.” Then he paused. He had to pause for the audience guffawed in wild merriment. Why? It was a colored audience. Many of them were black. Some black faces there were as beautiful as the night. Why did they laugh? Because the world had taught them to be ashamed of their color. Because for 500 years men had hated and despised and abused black folk. And now in strange, inexplicable transposition the rising blacks laugh at themselves in nervous, blatant, furtive merriment. They laugh because they think they are expected to laugh—because all their poor hunted lives they have heard "black" things laughed at.¹⁹

W.E.B. Du Bois, “In Black”, the *Crisis*, Oct. 1920.

Born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts on February 23, 1868, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois would become one of the great minds of the twentieth century. The first African American to receive a PhD from Harvard, the historian, sociologist, writer, editor and civil rights activist would throughout the years publish many scholarly and popular works on all subjects connected to Black life in America. It was in the *Crisis Magazine* that Du Bois for a period of twenty-four years would be able to consistently reach a primarily middle-class, educated African American readership and so bring to light many of the horrors and injustices suffered by African Americans from all classes throughout the country. As historian Gerald Horne point out, it was this “monthly that carried news, poetry, art, photographs, essays, and much, much more”, making it a journal that “chronicled the black freedom movement and agitated through print”. It was for this reason that “it was probably his time as editor of the *The Crisis* that was the apex of his sterling career”.²⁰ The question this chapter therefore seeks to analyze will therefore be: In what way were W.E.B. Du Bois’ ideas and notions on “race”, color and women expressed in the *Crisis Magazine*?

¹⁹ *The Crisis Magazine*, Vol. 20, no. 6 (October 1920), 263.

²⁰ Kirschke and Sinitiere. *Protest and Propaganda*, 11.

On May 31 and June 1, in response to the Springfield Race Riot of 1908²¹, which killed several African Americans and left two thousand others displaced, a National Negro Committee Conference was held in New York City in 1909. Following these “inter-racial” meetings, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People came into existence.²² The Conference in the end proved highly important not only for the creation of the NAACP and subsequently the *Crisis Magazine*, but also marked a new current in African American leadership. For, rejecting the beliefs of then influential accommodationist leader Booker T. Washington who opted not to join the conference, Du Bois and his co-founders of the NAACP introduced a new era of militant civil rights activism.

Du Bois, at the time a professor at Atlanta University and a scholar and writer well-known for his book of essays, *The Souls of Black Folk* published in 1903, was asked to give up his position in Atlanta to join the new organization full-time. After some negotiations he was offered among other positions that of director of Publications and Research. Du Bois, who had previous experience writing for and leading African American magazines while residing in Atlanta, Georgia, subsequently campaigned for the creation of an official magazine for the NAACP. Du Bois’ editorial experience had started with his first periodical, *The Moon Illustrated Weekly* in 1905, a magazine short-lived because of his time constraints due to other responsibilities, and a later second periodical titled *The Horizon: A Journal of the Color Line* published in 1907. His long-time dream finally became a reality with the independently funded *Crisis Magazine: A Record for the Darker Races*. Because of its location in New York alone, the *Crisis* afforded new freedoms and opportunities to Du Bois; where Atlanta, the city he left behind, was still very much shaped by Jim

²¹ Also see: James L. Crouthamel “The Springfield Race Riot of 1908.” *The Journal of Negro History* 45, no. 3 (1960), 164–181, Roberta Senechal De La Roche, *In Lincoln’s Shadow: The 1908 Race Riot in Springfield, Illinois* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).

²² Elliott M. Rudwick, “The National Negro Committee Conference of 1909.” *The Phylon Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1957), 413. Also read: Shawn Leigh Alexander, *An Army of Lions: The Civil Rights Struggle before the NAACP* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), Gilbert Jonas, *Freedom’s Sword the NAACP and the Struggle against Racism in America, 1909-1969* (New York: Routledge, 2005), Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The Naacp and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009).

Crow, New York City where the *Crisis* would be headquartered, gave him the freedom to write and publish anything he pleased.

Although independently funded, the magazine from its conception until now has been the official magazine for the NAACP, with its primary goals always closely aligned to the association. The objective of the magazine as Du Bois explained in his editorial in the first issue, was to:

set forth those facts and arguments which show the danger of race prejudice, particularly as manifested to-day toward colored people. It takes its name from the fact that the editors believe that this is a critical time in the history of the advancement of men.²³

As art historian Amy Helene Kirschke and historian Philip Luke Sinitiere point out, the title of the magazine was based on a poem by nineteenth-century poet James Russell Lowell titled “The Present Crisis” “which captured the idea that America’s racial problem was *the* crisis of the hour.”²⁴

With the *Crisis* Du Bois thus finally in 1910 had a platform to consistently spread his at the time militant ideas about race, and the magazine from 1910 until 1934 reflected Du Bois’ personal beliefs. With a readership starting at a 1,000 in November of 1910 which rose to 16,000 in just over a year,²⁵ and as sociologist Elliott M. Rudwick notes, to a readership of 30,000 in 1913 of which about three-fourths of the copies “were sold to negroes,”²⁶ the *Crisis* became one of the most important African American news magazines of the early twentieth century.

Du Bois did not take this responsibility lightly and for the entirety of his editorship at the *Crisis* he used the magazine to propagate his ideas and beliefs, brought to light many of the injustices suffered by Blacks in the United States, and discussed a better African American future in the

²³ *Crisis*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (November 1910), editorial.

²⁴ Amy Helene Kirschke and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, “W.E.B Du Bois as Print Propagandist”, in Kirschke and Sinitiere. *Protest and Propaganda*, 49.

²⁵ *Crisis*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (January, 1912), 92.

²⁶ Rudwick, “W. E. B. Du Bois in the Role of *Crisis* Editor,” 214.

democracy. As Du Bois argued, the magazine was first and foremost to “be a newspaper”, which would “record important happenings and movements in the world which bear on the great problem of inter-racial relations, and especially those which affect the Negro-American.”²⁷ Among these would be very prominently the horrors of lynching, represented most visibly in a report of the lynching of Jesse Washington in Waco Texas to which the magazine dedicated a supplement in the July 1916 issue of the *Crisis*, studies on the Great Migration when a mass migration began to visibly alter the demographics of African America, but also on the Great War and African American participation in it. To combat racial injustices and racial stereotypes, Du Bois stated:

only the publication of the truth repeatedly and incisively and uncompromisingly can secure that change in public opinion which will correct these awful lies. THE CRISIS, our record of the darker races, must have a circulation not of 35,000 chiefly among colored folk but of at least 250,000 among all men who believe in men. It must not be a namby-pamby box of salve, but a voice that thunders fact and is more anxious to be true than pleasing.²⁸

However, articles in the *Crisis* were not limited to news items; just as important, the magazine would become a forum and distributor for all African American ideas and cultural expressions.

The following section will examine a few major themes connected specifically to the creation of a new image of black with the New Negro Movement, and to the advocacy for women’s rights by W.E.B. Du Bois during his role as editor of the *Crisis*.

Apart from using the *Crisis* as a news medium, Du Bois acknowledged the fact that the magazine was well suited to combat negative racial stereotypes, and, through both visual images and text, introduce the image of a new middle-class negro. For it was not without reason that he dedicated so much of the magazine to the accomplishments of the “men” and “women of the

²⁷ *Crisis*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (November 1910), editorial.

²⁸ *Crisis*, Vol. 9, No. 6(April 1915), 312.

month”, to African American cultural expressions represented in poetry and other writings, and to college education for both men and women. As Du Bois wrote years before he would found the *Crisis*, in an essay titled “The Talented Tenth”, “The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men”.²⁹ To create these exceptional men. “the best and most capable of their youth” were to “be schooled in the colleges and universities of the land.”³⁰ Subsequently these educated “talented tenth” were to be “made leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people.”³¹ As sociologist Rutledge M. Dennis explains, the exceptional men Du Bois referred to were both men and women as “he used “manhood” as a universal term to apply to men and women.”³² Although Du Bois described this concept of the “talented tenth” as early as 1903, later editions of the *Crisis* under his editorship would illustrate his belief in the redemption of the race by the “talented tenth”, as much of the magazine was dedicated to glorifying the most talented among the African American community, and large sections of each edition were devoted to advertisements for the “Negro Colleges”. The future of the “colored people”, however, although including both men and women, would be predominantly middle class as not everybody could afford to spend several years at college learning both “work” and “life.”³³

It was there, in the realm of education, that opinions of Du Bois and famous African American leader Booker T. Washington most diverged. Washington throughout the years and in his book *Negro Problem* of 1903 strongly favored industrial training over the college training Du Bois had envisioned for his “talented tenth”, arguing that “by the side of industrial training should always go mental and moral training, but the pushing of mere abstract knowledge into the head means little.”

²⁹ W.E.B Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth” in: Washington, Booker T. *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today* (New York: James Pott & Company, 1903), 33.

³⁰ Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth”, 45.

³¹ Ibid, 75.

³² Donald Cunnigen, Rutledge M. Dennis, eds., *Racial Politics of Booker T. Washington*. Vol. 1st ed. Research in Race and Ethnic Relations (Amsterdam: JAI Press Inc, 2006), 7.

³³ Cunnigen, Dennis, eds., *Racial Politics of Booker T. Washington*, 75.

Washington argued that “we want more than the mere performance of mental gymnastics. Our knowledge must be harnessed to the things of real life.”³⁴ Du Bois, refuting the then dominant ideas of the highly influential Black leader, dedicated one chapter in his *Souls of Black Folks* of 1903 to criticizing Washington, arguing that by opposing “the higher training and ambition of our brighter minds” in favor of “industrial training for the masses”³⁵, “Mr. Washington represents in Negro thought the old attitude of adjustment and submission.”³⁶ This difference in opinion between the two leaders, one old, one new, was no coincidence, however. As Dennis argues, Booker T. Washington’s black supporters were found mostly among the working-class African American community, while Du Bois would find most of his followers among “among the small group of college-educated professionals”.³⁷

In the *Crisis* Du Bois also aimed to change negative stereotypes within the African American community. As Kirschke and Sinitiere point out, by using history and art as tools “to establish a new memory of the black American experience, he hoped to define the middle-class identity as both American and African.”³⁸ It is then not surprising that with his *Crisis* Du Bois would be at the forefront of what would become the New Negro Movement, a movement later also known as the Harlem Renaissance because of where the movement was centered. This movement which advocated race consciousness, political equality and a new sense of agency would be characterized by its intellectual, social and artistic expressions. The movement of the 1920s was a direct result of the Great Migration, which brought many intellectuals and artists who would become the primary

³⁴ Booker T. Washington, *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today* (New York, James Pott & Company, 1903), 18.

³⁵ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 43.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 38.

³⁷ Cunnigen, Dennis, eds., *Racial Politics of Booker T. Washington*, 12.

³⁸ Kirschke and Sinitiere. “W.E.B Du Bois as Print Propagandist”, 51.

actors of the movement up North,³⁹ and African American participation in World War I,⁴⁰ leading both to new demands of equality and a new sense of agency among Black Americans. And this was not the only major social movement of the 1920s; with the ratification of the 19th Amendment American women in 1920 had just been given the right to vote and began exerting a new sense of agency and image as the flappers of the 1920s, sporting shorter skirts and bobbed hair. On the other hand, the 1920s were also times of widespread legally enforced segregation in the South and informal social segregation in the North, while the Ku Klux Klan regained widespread popularity after the release of the *Birth of a Nation*. It was against the setting of these movements that the New Negro came into existence. *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (1925), a volume edited by Alain Locke, considered by many as the seminal work of the movement, also included a chapter by Du Bois which discussed the connection between “the color line” and labor titled “The Negro Mind Reaches Out”. Alain Locke in his foreword even partly attributed the “development” of the New Negro to the *Crisis* arguing that it was “particularly as a literary movement” that the New Negro movement “gradually gathered momentum in the effort and output of such progressive race periodicals as the *Crisis* under the editorship of Dr. Du Bois.”⁴¹ Indeed, even before Alain Locke’s *New Negro* was published, Du Bois had dedicated pages of the *Crisis* to the construction of the “New Negro”. As stated Shawn Leigh Alexander argues in the introduction of *Protest and Propaganda*, the *Crisis* in the 1920s would become “a major voice and supporter” for the New Negro movement. This was also because the *Crisis* “had always been, in part, a literary magazine”,

³⁹ See: Nell Irvin Painter, *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender*. Edited by Joe William Trotter Jr (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), Ira Berlin, *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations* (New York: Penguin, 2010), Maurice Isserman, *Journey to Freedom: The African-American Great Migration*. (New York: Facts on File, 1997).

⁴⁰ Also see: Chad Lewis Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2013), Nina Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial : The African American Experience During World War I* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2011), Mark Whalan, ““The Only Real White Democracy” and the Language of Liberation: The Great War, France, and African American Culture in the 1920s”, *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 51, no. 4 (2005), 775–800.

⁴¹ Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, Inc., 1920; New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 26.

in which Du Bois “continuously gave space to prose, poetry and artistic expression”.⁴² The magazine’s reputation as a literary advocate would also be due to Du Bois’ hiring of writer Jessie Redmond Fauset in 1919 as literary editor of the magazine. Du Bois, together with Fauset, who was able to much better connect with and nurture the young writers of the New Negro Movement,⁴³ published writings of authors such as Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes. As Alexander points out, this in an effort to help “dismantle the stereotyped negative images of African Americans and the African Diaspora created by white novelists” which were held as true by vast numbers of the American audience.⁴⁴

Apart from literary writings by outside writers, Du Bois also created his own play titled *The Star of Ethiopia*. The goal of the “Negro drama” was:

“to teach on the one hand the colored people themselves the meaning of their history and their rich, emotional life through a new theatre, and on the other, to reveal the Negro to the white world as a human, feeling thing”, in this way demonstrating “that pageantry among colored people is not only possible, but in many ways of unsurpassed beauty and can be made a means of uplift and education.”⁴⁵

As Martina Mallocci points out, Du Bois used the *Ethiopia Star* “pageant” both to create an original ideal of black beauty against the white norm, and to illustrate that people of African descent in America “could be both artists and subjects, as well as agents- and not merely objects,”⁴⁶ providing Black Americans with a new sense of agency.

⁴² Shawn Leigh Alexander, “W.E.B Du Bois as Print Propagandist”, 21.

⁴³ Carmiele Y. Wilkerson and Shamoan Zamir. “Du Bois and the ‘New Negro.’” In *The Cambridge Companion to W. E. B. Du Bois*, edited by Shamoan Zamir (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 73.

⁴⁴ Shawn Leigh Alexander, ‘W.E.B Du Bois as Print Propagandist’, 21.

⁴⁵ *Crisis*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (August, 1916), 171-173.

⁴⁶ Martina Mallocci, “‘All Art Is Propaganda’: W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Crisis* and the Construction of a Black Public Image.” *USAbroad – Journal of American History and Politics* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 2018), 6.

The genesis of the “New Negro” also revealed itself in other arts and visual images displayed in the *Crisis*. Apart from writing, Du Bois would also thus make calculated use of visual images to counter the use of racialized and racist stereotypes which had been prevalent in mainstream white print and advertising for so long. For the construction of the New Negro, Du Bois would use photographs of “men and women of the month”, featured in the magazine for their accomplishments, images of children in the originally “Children’s Annual Number”, political protest photographs and drawings, and photographs of primarily fair-skinned women on the *Crisis* covers. As Russ Castronovo argues, “at a time when some black intellectuals found safe harbor in the doctrine of art for art’s sake, The *Crisis* as an agent of black print culture pushed a confrontational aesthetics that revalued traditional categories of the beautiful.”⁴⁷ By both reshaping the “race’s” image of itself and by on the other hand using image as a tool for propaganda against the horrors of racism, Du Bois was able to serve two audiences at the same time, one “colored” and one white. Mallocci similarly argues that with the *Crisis* Du Bois made strategic use of visual arts to simultaneously confront racial (and racist) stereotypes and “dignify blackness” as early as the early 1910s.⁴⁸ Du Bois, however, was not the only one to promote the “New Negro”.

As Henry Louis Gates Jr. argues, in response to racialized stereotypical images of African Americans, African American intellectuals decided to produce an image of a “New Negro”.⁴⁹ Starting as early as the late nineteenth century, publications on this “new negro” aimed to reconstruct and recreate a racist image of blackness. In this manner these publications “intended to turn the new century’s image of the black away from the stereotypes scattered throughout plantation fictions, blackface minstrels, vaudeville, racist pseudo-science, and vulgar Social Darwinism.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Russ Castronovo, “Beauty along the Color Line: Lynching, Aesthetics, and the ‘Crisis.’” *PMLA* 121, no. 5 (2006): 1443.

⁴⁸ Mallocci, “All Art Is Propaganda”, 2.

⁴⁹ Henry Louis Gates Jr., “The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black”, *Representations* 24 (Autumn 1988), 149-150.

⁵⁰ Gates, “The Trope of a New Negro”, 136-137.

Such efforts could not, however, easily erase the centuries of racialized racist propaganda. As y Du Bois wrote in the October 1920 issue of the *Crisis*,

The whites obviously seldom picture brown and yellow folk, but for five centuries they have exhausted every ingenuity of trick, of ridicule and caricature on black folk: "grinning" Negroes, "happy" Negroes, "gold dust twins", "Aunt Jemimas", "solid" headed tacks— everything and anything to make Negroes ridiculous. As a result if *The Crisis* puts a black face on its cover our 500,000 colored readers do not see the actual picture—they see the caricature that white folks intend when they make a black face.⁵¹

As Du Bois suggests in this quote, though his *Crisis* he made a conscious effort to widen Black American beauty ideals, seeking to reconstruct an image of blackness which had before been so carefully misconstrued by “whites”, the Black American middle-class readership of the *Crisis* could not or would not accept such an effort. The connection of African American beauty ideals of light complexion and other generally “Eurotypic” features which shall be discussed in the following chapters connects well to the ethnic make up of the group as, since previously discussed, those part of the middle class, through historical actors, were often of lighter complexion exactly because they gained their upper class positions due to their mixed heritage.

Apart from using the *Crisis* as a tool of propaganda against racism in American society and to completely transform the old into the “New Negro”, Du Bois also used his magazine to garner support for women’s rights. African American women had particularly suffered racism in the women’s suffrage movement. The women’s rights and the abolitionist movements had been very closely connected until the vote was given to African American men with the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution. Discontented that the vote had been given to African

⁵¹ *Crisis*, Vol. 20, no. 6 (October 1920), 263.

American men and not to them, White women turned against African American suffrage, and starting from the 1890s even began to actively speak out against it.⁵² As Jean Fagan Yellin points out, it would be Du Bois would become one of the fiercest advocates of female suffrage. Du Bois used the *Crisis* to both expose the racism in the women's rights movement and to reunite the mainstream women's movement and the civil rights movement by demonstrating the similarities between the two, pointing out that both groups suffered injustice in America.⁵³ Throughout the years, Du Bois wrote many articles about the women's suffrage movement and even dedicated two complete issues on the Black American struggle for female suffrage. These issues of September of 1912 and August of 1915 appropriately featured on their covers Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth with Abraham Lincoln, respectively.⁵⁴ Arguing for female suffrage, Du Bois discussed the advantages of the vote for colored women:

The enfranchisement of these women will not be a mere doubling of our vote and voice in the nation; it will tend to stronger and more normal political life, the rapid dethronement of the "heeler" and "grafter" and the making of politics a method of broadest philanthropic race betterment, rather than a disreputable means of private gain.⁵⁵

Du Bois' support of women, "colored" women in particular, was not restricted to the vote. As Amy Helene Kirschke points out, Du Bois also vehemently defended "the black woman's right to personal freedom and social equity, and throughout his lifetime he supported women's rights in general".⁵⁶ Du Bois' lifelong support also revealed itself in the articles he chose to publish in the

⁵² Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1998), 79.

⁵³ Jean Fagan Yellin, "Dubois "Crisis" and Woman's Suffrage", *The Massachusetts Review* 12 (Spring 1973), 374.

⁵⁴ *The Crisis Magazine*, Vol 4, no 5. Woman's suffrage number (September 1912), and *The Crisis Magazine*, Vol 10, no. 4 (August 1915)

⁵⁵ *Crisis*, Vol. 4, No. 5. (September, 1912), 234.

⁵⁶ Amy Helene Kirschke, "DuBois and 'the Crisis' Magazine", 40.

Crisis; he often published articles on subjects connected to women's rights such as studies of employment of black women, as well as articles on sexist discrimination against white women, racist discrimination against black women, and biographies of outstanding African American women.

This chapter sought to examine in what way W.E.B. Du Bois' expressed ideas and notions on "race", color and women in the *Crisis Magazine*. As demonstrated it was exactly in order to spread these concepts and opinions to a larger audience that Du Bois created the *Crisis*, a magazine that most likely would not have gained the popularity it did if Du Bois had not been at the helm of the magazine.

When Du Bois founded the *Crisis Magazine*, a lifelong endeavor became a reality. Although the previous magazines Du Bois founded were short-lived, the *Crisis* was granted success and longevity above any previous expectations. Albeit primarily a civil rights magazine, the *Crisis* would also become known for its inclusion of African American literature and other forms of cultural expressions. The magazine was at the center of the Harlem Renaissance, which advocated a new sense of "racial" pride and agency through these various cultural expressions. As Elliott M. Rudwick puts it, "the artistic renaissance was probably the crowning glory of the Negro society which the *Crisis* sought to develop."⁵⁷ The fact that Du Bois was able to exercise complete control over the contents of the magazine allowed him to use the *Crisis* as a tool to promote his ideal world, one free of the constraints of racism and sexism, one in which African American women and men could think, create and live without inhibitions. As Du Bois put it,

A mighty and swelling human consciousness is leading us joyously to embrace the darker world, but we remain afraid of black pictures because they are the cruel reminders of the

⁵⁷ Rudwick, "W. E. B. Du Bois in the Role of *Crisis* Editor.", 231.

crimes of Sunday “comics” and “Nigger’ minstrels”. Off with these thought-chains and inchoate soul-shrinkings, and let us train ourselves to see beauty in black. ⁵⁸

However, although Du Bois was actively engaged in the fight against racism and sexism, he could not prevent “colorism” from sneaking into the pages of his middle-class magazine. It is this middle-class culture which shall be the focus of the following chapter.

⁵⁸ *Crisis*, Vol. 20, no. 6 (October 1920), 266.

2. Passing into whiteness: class, identity and the passing narrative

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.⁵⁹

Double-consciousness is a term coined by W.E.B Du Bois in the late nineteenth century. Later further clarified and defined in “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” in *The Souls of Black Folk*, the term is used to refer to the “double selves” or identities the African American was forced to carry in a white dominated America. As will be discussed later, similar issues of double-consciousness existed for those who were of light enough complexion to “pass” for white.⁶⁰

Challenging traditional borders of “race”, those passing social and geographical boundaries often undermined the dominant narrative of racial separation and segregation. What’s more, “passers” who successfully were able to insert themselves into white society often were able to cross both boundaries of “race” and class, climbing the social ladder through new employment opportunities, or for women through marriage with upperclass white men. Nowhere clearer, do matters of class identity and the difficulties of “race” in America thus become than in the “passing” novel where these markers intersect. This is underlined by the fact that these stories of “passing” are of course produced by members of the upper, often ethnically mixed, class. It is for this reason that this chapter shall examine the makings of both the black bourgeoisie and later the black cultural elite during the New Negro Movement or Harlem Renaissance in connection to the “passing” stories in the *Crisis*. This leads to the main question this chapter seeks to answer, which is, how did

⁵⁹ Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk*, 10.

⁶⁰ This comparison is also made by Mar Gallego, *Passing Novels in the Harlem Renaissance: Identity Politics and Textual Strategies* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2003), and by John Sheehy “The Mirror and the Veil: The Passing Novel and the Quest for American Racial Identity.” *African American Review* 33, no. 3 (1999), 401.

notions of class and “race” influence the creation and nature of passing stories in the *Crisis* during the Harlem Renaissance or New Negro Movement?

Before further delving into the passing narrative it is important to again look at the makings of the black middle class. As written by sociologist E. Franklin Frazier in his seminal case study of the African American middle class titled *The Black Bourgeoisie* (1957), even during segregation the African American upper class held a superior position due to their mixed ancestry.⁶¹ As Du Bois argues:

But the thing that makes the mulatto especially useful is that, with the white man, he shares the pride of his white blood and is less likely than the black to submit to artificial distinctions of race where nature has bridged them ... The most prominent present-day mulatto, although ostensibly an advocate of servility to the white man, has generally managed to secure, for himself at least, the consideration given to a white.⁶²

Although principally white-collar workers, and educated at “Negro” colleges,⁶³ their dominant position was primarily derived from the fact that middle-class Black Americans held “strategic positions in segregated institutions” which allowed them to “propagate the ideologies” then “current in the Negro community.”⁶⁴ It is not without reason, then, that the African American middle class or Black bourgeoisie responded to the Harlem Renaissance, or as Frazier called it, the Negro Renaissance which turned to the black masses for inspiration, with ambivalence.⁶⁵ In fact as previously stated with respect to the *Crisis Magazine*, Frazier argues that, “although the Negro

⁶¹ Franklin E. Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1957), 20.

⁶² *Crisis*, Vol. 6, No. 5 (September, 1913), 230.

⁶³ Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, 43, 84

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

press declares itself to be the spokesmen for the Negro group as a whole, it represents essentially the interests and outlook of the black bourgeoisie.”⁶⁶ Frazier is not the only scholar to differentiate between the young intellectual leaders of the “Negro Renaissance” and the socially dominant “black bourgeoisie”. As Pamela L. Caughie points out, Harlem, where the movement was centered, was “decidedly not bourgeois.” And although the artists and intellectuals of the movement might have initially pursued the socioeconomic and educational status the black bourgeoisie possessed, through their writings, they more and more differentiated between the old black bourgeoisie and their own newer black cultural elite, creating refined “class distinctions within that shared social space.”⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the new cultural elite, although actively engaging in renewed appreciation for the negro laborer or black masses, still carried with them some of the legacies of the old black bourgeoisie or middle class. This contradiction revealed itself in the dominant beauty ideals held by the social groups, for, as Rudwick points out, “The renaissance was essentially directed by mulattoes” which made it hard even for Du Bois in the *Crisis* to “convince them to appreciate blackness as a standard of beauty.”⁶⁸

Just as there seemed to be a contradiction between the ideals of the new cultural elite and the traditional middle-class, a similar break also revealed itself with Du Bois and his *Crisis*. Du Bois, himself part of the traditional black bourgeoisie, and catering initially to a predominantly middle-class audience with his magazine, became a key player in the Harlem Renaissance or New Negro Movement not only as an author, but, with the help of literary editor Jessie Fauset he also used the magazine as a central platform for the distribution of the cultural expressions of the movement and the introduction of those who would become key literary figures in it. A key method for finding

⁶⁶ Ibid., 174.

⁶⁷ Pamela L. Caughie, “‘The Best People’: The Making of the Black Bourgeoisie in Writings of the Negro Renaissance.” *Modernism/Modernity* 20, no. 3 (2013), 520.

⁶⁸ Rudwick, “W. E. B. Du Bois in the Role of *Crisis* Editor.”, 232.

these new gifted writers was, as Shawn Anthony Christian points out, the literary contest.⁶⁹ The contests with money prizes allowed the *Crisis* and other magazines to both uplift the African American community and find new literary talents as well as financially support and offer a greater platform to new writers and poets. Thematic contradictions related to the representation of all colored people in both writing and image would continue, however. Although, as shall be argued later in this thesis, a definite preference for lighter complexion becomes clear in the imagery of the magazine, the writings in the *Crisis* offer a much more balanced perspective of the colored experience in America, thus making it hard to categorize the writings in the magazine. However, the “passing” narrative does occasionally make its appearance.

“Passing”, or the act or ability of a person to be regarded as a member of an identity group or category different from their own, has long been a theme in of American literature and the American imagination. Those who were mixed with both black and white, from half black, to a quarter black and even one eighth black, referred to as mulattoes, quadroons and octoroons respectively, and were visibly white, were able to “pass” for white. Leaving behind their families and their predominantly African American neighborhoods allowed those “passing” a chance of upward social mobility. Even before the “passing” narrative would become part of the African American literary tradition it was part of white American literature, which was aimed at a primarily white readership, and sought to create characters with which the reader could identify: a white or near-white person.⁷⁰ The new “passing” novel, created for a black readership was different however, as it left behind the racialized stereotypes that had permeated the pages of previous writings. In a movement focused on reclaiming black identity and combatting negative stereotypes authors of the Harlem Renaissance would later become famous for writing novels about those who appeared near-white. As Cherene Sherrard Johnson argues, in this way the “passing” novel was able to speak to

⁶⁹ Shawn Anthony Christian, *The Harlem Renaissance and the Idea of a New Negro Reader* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 44-45.

⁷⁰ Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, 248.

two audiences, white readers seeking to vicariously experience Black American culture, and African American readers who recognized the “passer’s” “trespasses in mainstream society.”⁷¹ “Passing” novels in the new Movement, as Maria Giulia Fabi argues, often also stayed close to the old stereotype of the tragic mulatto or mulatta who was stuck between two worlds, and often unable to come to terms with his or her “multicultural and multiethnic alliances”.⁷² “Passing” in this way underlined the double-consciousness of the “passer”, the consciousness that connected him or her to the African American community, and the consciousness connecting to a white identity as seen through the eyes of the outside world. The most famous examples of this genre of literary expressions were Nella Larsen with *Passing* (1929), James Weldon Johnson with *The Biography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) and the *Crisis*’ own Jessie Fauset with *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral* (1928). All of these authors had been, at one point or another, published in the *Crisis*, and all of these works feature protagonists who leave behind their ethnic community for opportunities in the “white world”. Larsen’s *Passing* in particular has received extensive scholarly attention for its criticism of sexism and traditional gender roles and the African American middle class.⁷³ The novella explores the lives of and relationship between “light skinned” Irene Redfield, who is married to a darker complexioned African American doctor, and her “light-skinned” friend, Clare Kendry, who is passing unbeknownst to her successful and wealthy white husband.

Even in the New Negro movement or Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, the theme of interracial or even “intercolor” relationships in relation to “passing” was not new. In fact, short stories on the difficulties of these “passers” had been published in the *Crisis* in the previous decade. There are a number of such stories, for instance one of a salesgirl who was fired after the company

⁷¹ Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, *Portraits of the New Negro Woman: Visual and Literary Culture in the Harlem Renaissance* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 13.

⁷² Maria Giulia Fabi, *Passing and the Rise of the African American Novel* (University of Illinois Press, 2001), 1.

⁷³ Fabi, *Passing and the Rise of the African American Novel*, Sheehy. “The Mirror and the Veil”, 401, Corinne E Blackmer., “The Veils of the Law: Race and Sexuality in Nella Larsen’s *Passing*,” n.d., 19, *College Literature*, Vol. 22, No. 3, *Race and Politics: The Experience of African-American Literature* (Oct., 1995), pp. 50-67, Sherrard-Johnson, *Portraits of the New Negro Woman*.

found out she was “colored” only to be rehired again at the request of important clients, a coming of age story of a woman who was thrown out of the house by her husband after he found out she might have been “colored”, a story of a blond-haired child living on a plantation who was inexplicably drawn to the “negro spirituals” and later turned out to be mixed, and a number of advertisements for novels on “passing”.⁷⁴ I will focus on and examine two of these stories.

The first of these stories titled “Emmy” by Jessie Fauset (1912) is particularly interesting because it features an intelligent and “pretty brown girl” who fell in love with and later got engaged to Archie Ferrers, a young man whose “clear olive skin and aquiline features made his Negro ancestry difficult of belief”.⁷⁵ Unlike most “passing” narratives, the “passer” in this story is male. The light complexion of the male character, Archie Ferrer, allowed him to “pass” at his place of employment, as he tells his girlfriend Emmy,

“You see, this plagued— er— complexion of mine doesn't tell anybody what I am. At first— and all along, too, if I let them—fellows take me for a foreigner of some kind — Spanish or something, and they take me up hail-fellow-well-met. And then, if I let them know— I hate to feel I'm taking them in, you know, and besides that I can't help being curious to know what's going to happen-.”⁷⁶

The second of the two stories, “High Yaller” (1925) by Rudolph Fisher, won the Amy Spingarn short story contest. “High yaller” refers to high yellow, or a person of African American descent who has a very light complexion. The protagonist of the story, Evelyn, looks white, with blonde hair and blue eyes, and is in a relationship with the much darker Jay. This situation causes many

⁷⁴ *Crisis*; ‘Mildred Porter’s Position’, Hull, B. G, Vol. 5, No. 5 (March, 1913), 241, ‘The Sleeper Wakes; A Novelette’. Jessie Fauset, Vol. 20, No. 4. (August, 1920), 189, Vol. 20, No. 5. (September, 1920), 226, Vol. 20, No. 6. (October, 1920), 267. and ‘The Golden-Haired Maiden’, Sidney E. Dickinson, Vol. 10, No. 2. (June, 1915), 92.

⁷⁵ *Crisis*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (December, 1912), 80.

⁷⁶ *Crisis*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (December, 1912), 83.

inconveniences because Evelyn struggles with issues of identity but also because they are perceived as an interracial couple by the public which leads to annoying and sometimes even dangerous situations for Jay in particular. Issues of identity are often brought up by Evelyn who even says to Jay:

“I wish I looked like Mayme”... “A washerwoman can make half a million dollars turning dark skins light. Why doesn’t someone learn how to turn light skins dark?”, followed later by “Jay, can you imagine what it’s like to be colored and look white?”...”there goes Evelyn Brown- queen of the lily whites- nothing brown about her but her name.”⁷⁷

Throughout the story Fisher also suggests that Evelyn only consorts with Jay in order to move away from her whiteness and effectively become “more black”. This becomes all the more clear when Evelyn says that if she associates with Jay, “no one’s going to accuse me of jim-crowing again!”⁷⁸

Alongside problems of identity and belonging also comes envy of the “passer” towards their darker complexioned counterpart, who knows exactly where here or she “belongs”, as Archie says to Emmy,

“And don't you know that's the thought I've had ever since—why not leave well enough alone?—and not tell people what I am. I guess you're different from me,” he broke off wistfully, noting her look of disapproval ; “you're so complete and satisfied in yourself.”⁷⁹

Others who explicitly seek to lighten their skin, by (permanently) whitening it to try to gain a higher standing in society:

⁷⁷ *Crisis*, Vol 30. No 6. (October 1925), 282.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁷⁹ *Crisis*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (December, 1912), 83.

“Point is, there aren’t any more dark girls. Skin bleach and rouge have wiped out the strain. The blacks have turned sealskin, the sealskins are high-brown, the high-browns are all yaller, and the yallers are pink. How’s a bird gonna fall for what ain’t?”⁸⁰

This quote is also interesting because it makes clear that African American women as early as 1925 were using skin whiteners to lighten their skin to conform to beauty standards of lighter complexion. This issue will be further examined in the next chapter.

Throughout the short stories it becomes clear that there is thus a disconnect between the light complexioned “passer” and their envy of a sense of belonging to the African American population their counterparts possess, and the envy of their counterparts, explicitly or not, of their better treatment and the opportunity to at any moment decide to “pass” for white, leaving behind all the problems members of their “race” endured. As Emmy says to Archie, “How exciting your life must be— now white and now black—standing between ambition and honor, what? Not that I don't think you're doing the right thing—it's nobody's confounded business anyway”. To which Archie later responds, “I don't care about being white in itself any more than you do— but I do care about a white man's chances.”⁸¹

Archie Ferrer’s boss one time even spots the pair out in the open, but thinking it inconceivable that Ferrer is “colored” himself, his boss assumes that Emmy is a kept woman:

“if it isn't young Ferrers, with a lady, too! Hello, why it's a colored woman! Ain't he a rip? Always thought he seemed too proper. Got her dressed to death, too; so that's how his money goes!” He dismissed the matter with a smile and a shrug of his shoulders.⁸²

⁸⁰ *Crisis*, Vol 30. no 6. (October 1925), 282.

⁸¹ *Crisis*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (December, 1912), 84.

⁸² *Crisis*, Vol. 5, No. 3. (January 1913), 134.

Comments on these “intercolor” relationships do not only come from strangers who believe the couples are in an interracial relationship, Jay in response to his relationship with Evelyn is also told by a friend: “You’re too dark buddy. You’re ultra-violet anyhow, alone. Beside her you become absolute black-invisible. The lady couldn’t see you with an arc-lamp.”⁸³

After enduring many difficulties because of their “intercolor” relationship, Archie Ferrer in the end confesses that he is “colored”, and Emmy and Archie are soon after to be married. The relationship between characters Evelyn and Jay, however, ends differently. After her mother has passed away, no “colored” familial ties keep Evelyn to her community, and she decides to “pass” into whiteness. As Jay and a friend discuss, “But I think she’s jumped out of Harlem.” “You mean--passin?”⁸⁴

It is thus in the passing narrative that these issues of race and identity can be openly and clearly examined. As Jay exclaims near the end of the story:

What an enormity, blackness! From the demons and ogres and ravens of fairy tales on: storm-clouds, eclipses, night, the valley of the shadow, gloom, hell. White the standard of goodness and perfection. Christ himself, white. All the angels. Imagine a black angel! A black angel with a flat nose and thick lips, laughing loudly. The devil!⁸⁵

It is in this quote that the author is exposes the hypocrisy of whiteness and challenges the hierarchy of black and whiteness.

The fascination with “race” and “passing” is not confined to the literary expressions of the Harlem Renaissance. Du Bois in his *Crisis* would also provide opportunity for experts to clarify the

⁸³ *Crisis*, Vol 31. No. 1 (November 1925), 34.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

workings and the nature of “passing” in connection to “intermarriage” and “race-mixture”. As physical anthropologist Caroline Bond Day argued in the December 1930 issue of the *Crisis*,

Contrary to the popular idea, that one must be a quadroon or an octoroon to “pass”, some persons of little more than one-half white blood (particularly if there be a slight strain of Indian) are frequently mistaken for Europeans, and are often addressed as Spaniards or Italians. This is a Point on which the American public seems to be most stupid.⁸⁶

Bond even underlined her point by mentioning,

the ridiculous story of one Monsieur Dukey from New Orleans, who visited the city in the year of 1838, and who, because of his charming personality was received by the best society, entertained elaborately, and made the recipient of many favors. He then returned home, laid aside his grand manner, and his French name, and resumed his real role of quadroon barber.⁸⁷

But for what reason did the “passing” narrative become such an important part of African American literary expressions during the New Negro Movement in general and in the writings of the *Crisis Magazine* in particular? It is first important to note, that unlike with the overwhelming dominance of imagery of light complexioned women in the *Crisis*, many of the writings in the magazine were also devoted to the beauty of the darker skin.⁸⁸ It is secondly important to note that, although there are some similarities, novels featuring the traditional “tragic mulatta” are very different from the “passing” narrative in that the “passing” narrative by passing the boundary from

⁸⁶ *Crisis*, Vol 37, No. 3. (December 1930), 82.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁸⁸ To name a few, *Crisis*: “The Dusk-Born Daughter!”, Peyton, B. Harrison, Vol. 12, No. 3. (July, 1916), “Ebon Maid and Girl of Mine”, Lucian B. Watkins, Vol. 13, No. 3. (January, 1917) and “The Black Swan” (Moravsky, Maria), Vol. 22, No. 1. (May, 1921).

blackness into whiteness allows for questioning issues of “race” and identity not relevant to the “tragic mulatta” narrative in which the main character remains in her own colored group.

As for the *Crisis*, “passing” narratives were not, as a preference for images of light-skinned women would lead one to believe, published in the magazine in disproportionate numbers. Nevertheless, these narratives were still regularly published. It is therefore important to further analyze why the “passing” narrative was a regular feature in the magazine and later in other writings of the Harlem Renaissance. The popularity of the “passing” narrative could be due to a number of reasons.

First, because some members of the new cultural elite were also of mixed heritage, just like the black bourgeoisie, a “passing” novel, could be partially based on autobiographical experiences. Nella Larsen, herself of mixed heritage, in *Passing* discussed themes and issues she had dealt with throughout her life. As Nell Sullivan points out, Larsen’s rejection by her white family and difficulties within her marriage led Larsen to rework her own experiences as a Black woman in the twentieth century in *Passing*.⁸⁹ Thus, just as the authors and many readers were of mixed descent, so also would their main characters be.

Secondly, and very importantly, in times of widespread segregation both legally through Jim Crow legislation in the South, and culturally and socially in the North, the “passing” narrative could be a method to explore the inner workings of “race” and the “problem of the color line”. For could a color line even be drawn when there were those who belonged on both sides of the line? “Passing” narratives in this way were one of the great methods to criticize a system of dominant whiteness. For if the main character of the novel or story was white or near-white, it was difficult for the white reader to “other” the character and his or her experiences with race by placing them in the colored “box”. Sherrard-Johnson even argues that “moments of racial recognition and misrecognition” in

⁸⁹ Nell Sullivan, “Nella Larsen’s *Passing* and the Fading Subject.” *African American Review* 32, no. 3 (1998), 373, 383.

the *Passing* demonstrate not only how muddled the “color line” is, but also “dispel the notion that that whiteness is physiologically impossible to penetrate.”⁹⁰

The “passing” narrative in the (pre-)Harlem-Renaissance in this way became an outlet for authors to discuss “race”, class and identity. For just as “passers” used “passing” as a method to transcend boundaries of color, they also could transcend boundaries of class because of their newly acquired race. This was the case for women especially, as it allowed them to marry white and to marry well. Lastly, as the subject of the “passing” narrative was usually female, the passing novel was also a great medium for exploring boundaries of gender roles and beauty ideals, for as the imagery in the *Crisis* and in the New Negro Movement in general suggested, the ideal New Negro woman looked near-white, or a least “high yaller”.

This chapter sought to examine the way in which notions of “race” and class did not only influence the creation of the passing narrative but were also subsequently explored in the passing stories of the *Crisis Magazine*. As I have demonstrated, the new Black cultural elite, in contrast with the Black bourgeoisie, moved towards a new appreciation of the culture of the Black masses while often still longing for the educational and socioeconomic background the bourgeoisie possessed. It was in the “passing” narrative that issues of identity, double-consciousness, the color line, “race” and class could be examined. Although often explored, the fate of the “passer” would mostly end badly. While searching for a place to belong, those “passing” in the “passing” novels and stories would almost always find out that crossing the color line did not provide them the redemption they expected. In the end the “passer” of mixed heritage always remained suspended between the two “racial” groups, never belonging completely to one or the other. The story of the tragic “passer” is perhaps best summarized in this poem by Langston Hughes:

⁹⁰ Fabi, *Passing and the Rise of the African American Novel*, Sheehy, “The Mirror and the Veil”, Blackmer, Corinne E., “The Veils of the Law”, *College Literature*, Vol. 22, No. 3, *Race and Politics: The Experience of African-American Literature* (Oct., 1995), pp. 50-67, Nell Sullivan, ‘Nella Larsen’s Passing and the Fading Subject’, Sherrard-Johnson, *Portraits of the New Negro Woman*, 38.

My old man's a white old man

And my old mother's black.

If I ever cursed my white old man

I take my curses back

If I ever cursed my black old mother

And wished she were in hell,

I'm sorry for that evil wish

And now I wish her well

My old man died in a fine big house

My ma died in a shack

I wonder where I'm gonna die

Being neither white nor black.⁹¹

⁹¹ Langston Hughes, *Cross*, in the *Crisis*, vol 31. No. 2 (December 1925), 66.

3. Colorism in the *Crisis*.

The discovery of personal whiteness among the world's peoples is a very modern thing,—a nineteenth and twentieth century matter, indeed. The ancient world would have laughed at such a distinction. The Middle Age regarded skin color with mild curiosity; and even up into the eighteenth century we were hammering our national manikins into one, great, Universal Man, with fine frenzy which ignored color and race even more than birth. Today we have changed all that, and the world in a sudden, emotional conversion has discovered that it is white and by that token, wonderful!⁹²

This is a quote by W.E.B Du Bois in his 1920 book *Darkwater: Voices within the Veil*, a pioneering work not only in the field of whiteness studies, but also in the overarching field of critical race theory. It is no wonder that Du Bois in *Critical Race Theory, an Introduction*, originally published in 2001, is mentioned by legal scholars Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic as an author of the American radical tradition critical race theory builds upon.⁹³ Critical race theory is a theoretical framework that “that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices and discourses”.⁹⁴ The framework, according to Delgado and Stefancic, is based on several propositions. The first of these is that racism is engrained in American society. Rather than based in exception, racism influences the everyday lives of “people of color” in the United States. The second premise is that the hierarchy of “white-over-color” serves a purpose for, and advances the interests of, the dominant group. The third major theme is one that has been previously discussed in this thesis, namely the

⁹² W. E. B Du Bois, *Darkwater; Voices from within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1920; Ebook Project Gutenberg, 2005), 46.

⁹³ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory (Third Edition): An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press 2012), 28.

⁹⁴ Tara J. Yosso. “Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth.” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 8, no. 1 (March 2005), 70.

social construction of “race”.⁹⁵ While this thesis heretofore has examined this social, political and economic hierarchy based on the construct of “race”, and the consequences it has had for the African American or “colored” “race”, not a great deal of consideration has been given to the opposite side of the construct to which all else is compared, namely the construct of whiteness.

Similar to critical race studies, the field of whiteness studies examines the workings of whiteness and race in relation to racism and the creation and continuation of a social hierarchy. However, while it is decidedly clear who is colored and who is not because of legislation set up to justify and continue the hierarchy, it has not been as clear to determine who is to be considered white and who is not. As Delgado and Stefancic point out, it was in the American immigration courts that judges decided who was white and who was not, allowing those who qualified entry into the United States,⁹⁶ while denying access to those deemed “colored” until as late as the 1960s, when new legislation finally allowed for the immigration of those belonging to other “races”, among which especially Blacks. The key aspect of whiteness was and still remains its invisibility. As Barbara J. Flagg argues, the “most striking characteristic of white’s consciousness of whiteness is that most of the time we don’t have any,”⁹⁷ a phenomenon she refers to as the “*transparency phenomenon*”. While those able to make a claim to whiteness are free to represent just themselves as individuals, and not their entire “race”, those deemed non-white are firstly always viewed in relation to the invisible white norm and secondly awarded features and qualities connected to their race.⁹⁸ As sociologist Joe R. Feagin argues in *The White Racial Frame, Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing*, these features and qualities were actively circulated in printed press as well as in other forms of popular entertainment. Cartoons accentuating “ugly” racial

⁹⁵ Richard and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*, 32.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 111.

⁹⁷ Barbara J. Flagg, ““Was Blind, but now I See”: White Race Consciousness and the Requirement of Discriminatory Intent”, in Delgado, Stefancic, eds., *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 629.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 109-116.

characteristics, made visible in distinctive “hair, skin, lips, and odor”, taught “whites of all nationalities, ages, and classes the white racial framing of African Americans.”⁹⁹ And this occurred not only in print, as Feagin points out; minstrel and later vaudeville shows were a key method of perpetuating and reinforcing emotions and stereotypes through key visual images, anti-black framing that would reach a white audience that crossed social class lines, spreading the “frame” to both the upper and lower classes among which were “illiterate whites, new immigrants and younger whites.”¹⁰⁰ The racist imagery and the hierarchy of race, also affected black women in particular as the “dominant frame” also led to the creation of a hierarchy of beauty, one in which black women were not considered as beautiful as white women.¹⁰¹

It is here that the field of whiteness studies connects to the imagery of the *Crisis Magazine*. As discussed previously, in the early twentieth century black publications that were part of the New Negro Movement, in response to racist imagery in print, began to produce imagery of a New Negro.¹⁰² Now no longer subjected to racialized stereotypes, the New Negro in print would be portrayed with dignity. Although now no longer merely portrayed as mere caricatures but as complex human beings representative of the ethnic group, those depicted in the imagery were usually both middle class and of light complexion. It is for this reason that this chapter seeks to research to what extent a preference for a lighter complexion is visually represented in the magazine, supported by the following question; In what way does the imagery of women in the *Crisis*, represented on both the covers and in the advertisements in the publication, demonstrate a preference for lighter complexion, or “colorism”? As it is necessary to focus in particular on visual imagery rather than text it is imperative to set forth the parameters of the study. For this analysis,

⁹⁹ Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame, Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 105.

¹⁰⁰ Feagin, *The White Racial Frame*, 105.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 142

¹⁰² Gates, “The Trope of a New Negro”, 149-150.

both the covers and the beauty advertisements shall be investigated as well as the text accompanying the advertisements. I have chosen to analyze the covers in particular because it is the cover that is most important in drawing readers to purchase and read any publication and it is thus the cover that not only “conveyed ideas about women’s nature and roles”, but also represented “societal values”.¹⁰³ Any preference in selecting women of lighter complexion to be featured on the covers of the *Crisis* was no accident, but rather an expression of beauty ideals in the Black American community of the early twentieth century. This aspect is also underlined by Megan Williams in her essay titled “*The Crisis* Cover Girl: Lena Horne, Walter White, and the NAACP’s Representation of African American Femininity”. As Williams points out, starting from the early twentieth century the *Crisis Magazine* “pictured well-dressed, educated, and primarily light-skinned African American women on its covers in an attempt to subvert dominant representations of black women.”¹⁰⁴ Although supposedly placing these women on the covers to change stereotypical images of African Americans, the practice still appears contradictory. The decision of the civil rights magazine to overturn racialized stereotypes by mimicking the white middle class which was partially responsible for creating the “racial frame” in the first place seems both paradoxical and misguided. By opting to portray women in the *Crisis* who often looked as close to white mainstream beauty ideals as possible, Du Bois conformed to a beauty pecking order set in a “white-color” hierarchy, where whiteness trumped “color” not only economically and politically but also in all aspects of social life. Apart from the physical features of the women, a preference for the “white beauty ideal” was also visible in their clothing and hairstyle choices, mirroring the trends of the white middle class.

To further examine and clarify the construct of colorism of African American women in the covers of the magazine, it is essential to specify the methodological framework for the analysis.

¹⁰³ Carolyn Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 6.

¹⁰⁴ Megan E. Williams, “The Crisis Cover Girl: Lena Horne, Walter White, and the NAACP’s Representation of African American Femininity” in Kirschke and Sinitiere, *W.E.B Du Bois as Print Propagandist*, 223.

Connecting to the previous chapter on “passing” and middle class ideals, the women on the covers shall be divided into three categories. The first is those who are “passing” for white, who have no visible features commonly ascribed to African Americans. As I explained in my introduction, for the other two categories I have chosen to follow the division and terminology used by Lilly M. Fears, in her article “Black Women in News Editorial Photos”.¹⁰⁵ The first group Fears distinguishes is those of light complexion, women who are “visibly” at least partly Black American but have a generally “Eurotypic” appearance, which is characterized by at least one or more of the following features: light complexion, often less coily, straighter hair and other “Eurotypic” features such as a “smaller” nose and lips. The last of the three groups are those women of dark complexion or “Afrotypic” appearance, visibly black or African American, which is characterized by at least one or more of the following features: darker skin tone, a broad nose, full lips, and “kinky” hair. Also important to note is that in this study only photographs of women and lifelike drawings have been examined. Those abstract drawings featuring black women have not been taken into consideration, as it is only the covers featuring photographs and lifelike drawings of women that most directly reflect the beauty ideals of the African American middle class from 1910 until 1934. Women put on the covers because of their positions as activists connected to the NAACP rather than for their appearance have also been left out of this research as this research is geared specifically towards examining beauty ideals within the Black American community. Lastly, photographs of other ‘colored’ women, such as Filipino¹⁰⁶ and North African¹⁰⁷ women who were occasionally photographed on the covers for this reason have also not been considered with regard to this analysis.

¹⁰⁵ Lilly M. Fears, “Black Women in News Editorial Photos”, 30.

¹⁰⁶ *Crisis*, Vol 29. No. 5 (March 1925), Vol 32. No. 3. (July 1926).

¹⁰⁷ *Crisis Magazine*, Vol 29. No. 3. (January 1925) Vol 32. No. 1. (May 1926), Vol 33. No. 3. (January 1927).

From November 1910 until July 1934 W.E.B Du Bois was responsible for overseeing a 285 issues of the *Crisis* as editor-in-chief. Of these 285 issues, 97 feature women portrayed in photographs or lifelike drawings. It is necessary to note that especially in the early years of the magazine, women were often featured on the covers. Covers of later issues gave prominence to a wider variety of other subjects such as political imagery and prominent civil rights leaders underlining the civil rights foundation of the magazine, as well as to the creative expressions of the Harlem Renaissance with art works in art deco style. The women who were featured on the covers throughout the decades were mostly non-celebrities, and therefore often not much is known about the women.

Type of Features	Number of Covers Featuring Women	Percentage of Covers Featuring Women
“Passing” features	24	19
“Eurotypic” features	55	57
“Afrotypic” features	18	19
Lighter complexioned (“Passing + “Eurotypic”)	79	81

Table 3.1

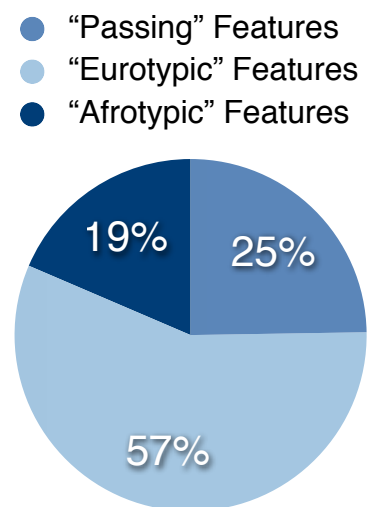


Chart 3.1

Of the 97 covers featuring women, 24 covers feature women who could “pass” for white, or who have no visible black features (figs. 3.1-3.2).¹⁰⁸ Although most images of women in all three groups are unfortunately not accompanied by the names or background information on the women featured on the covers, merely noting the photographer’s name followed by “photographed from life” or “taken from life”, some covers do include background information. One of these “passing” covers, the cover of the November 1913 issue (fig. 3.1), features, as indicated in the table of contents of the magazine, “an octoroon (photographed from life)”. The issue of March 1927 displays a drawing of a “white looking” woman, referred to in the table of contents as a “A Harlem Girl”. While the short stories on passing could serve as a bridge between the two racial worlds, and thus allow for a discussion on the complexities and unfairness of “race”, there was no reason for the civil rights magazine to feature women who did not represent the African American community other than the desire to appeal to the dominant beauty ideals of the time.

This trend of featuring light-complexioned women, not all representative of the ethnic group, on the covers of the magazine also continued with the second group of women presented on the covers: those who are visibly at least partially of African descent, but with “Eurotypic” features.

¹⁰⁸ *Crisis*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (August, 1911), Vol. 4, No. 2 (June, 1912), Vol. 4, No. 3 (July, 1912), Vol. 5, No. 1 (November 1912), Vol. 6, No. 1 (May, 1913), Vol. 6, No. 2 (June, 1913), Vol. 7, No. 1 (November, 1913), Vol. 7, No. 4 (February, 1914), Vol. 9, No. 2 (December, 1914), Vol. 11, No. 1 (November, 1915), Vol. 11, No. 4 (February, 1916), Vol. 12, No. 5 (September, 1916), Vol. 19, No. 2 (December, 1919), Vol. 19, No. 5 (March, 1920), Vol. 21, No. 6 (April, 1921), Vol. 32, No. 4 (August 1926, Vol. 34, No. 1 (March 1927), Vol. 40. No. 12 (December 1931), Vol. 40. No. 1 (January 1933) , Vol 40. No. 2 (February 1933) , Vol 40. No. 5. (May 1933), Vol. 40. No. 9 (September 1933).



Figure 3.1



Figure 3.2



Figure 3.3

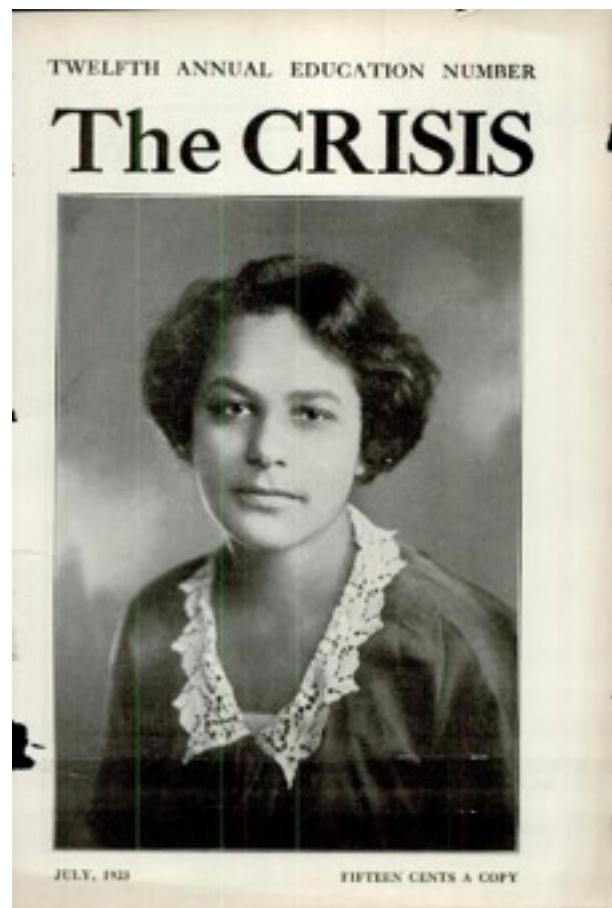


Figure 3.4

This group is by far the largest group of “covergirls”, with 55 out of 97 covers sporting women of lighter skin tone (figs 3.3-3.4)¹⁰⁹. Many of the women on the covers are visibly mixed. This is most clearly exemplified in one of the earliest issues, that of November of 1911, where the woman on the cover, a “quadroon”, is presented as a beauty ideal for the Black American community (fig. 3.3). On the cover, the woman’s name is not mentioned, just the fact that she is a “quadroon”, one quarter “colored” and three quarters white. The photograph is accompanied by a poem exalting her beauty, ending in “Beauty of Heaven and Earth”.¹¹⁰ By displaying this “quadroon” on the cover of the magazine, accompanied by a poem that highlights her mixed ancestry, it appears that nothing matters but the fact that the woman is of lighter complexion, and thus closer to the white ideals the African American middle class sought to embody. The November of 1922 issue of the magazine also presents an very much “mixed” looking “Haitienne born in Paris” on its cover. A later issue of November of 1923 again featured a drawing of an “octoroon”, a woman who is one-eighth black and seven-eighth white. Apart from underscoring the mixed heritage of the women presented on the covers, Du Bois in his *Crisis* also often included college students and graduates among the lighter complexioned group of cover girls, for example in the July 1923 issue where Clarissa Mae Scott, daughter of Emmett J. Scott secretary to Booker T. Washington and member of Phi Beta Kappa at Wellesley College was on display (fig. 3.4), and in the August 1924 issue where an unnamed Bachelor student in Philosophy at the University of Chicago was chosen as cover girl.

¹⁰⁹ *Crisis*; Vol. 3, No. 1 (November, 1911), Vol. 3, No. 3 (January, 1912), Vol. 3, No. 5 (March, 1912), Vol. 4, No. 4 (August, 1912), Vol. 5, No. 4 (February, 1913), Vol. 5, No. 5 (March, 1913), Vol. 6, No. 5 (September, 1913), Vol. 7, No. 2 (December, 1913), Vol. 7, No. 6 (April, 1914), Vol. 8, No. 5 (September, 1914), Vol. 9, Issue 3 (January, 1915), Vol. 9, No. 6 (April, 1915), Vol. 10, No. 2 (June, 1915), Vol. 11, No. 6 (April, 1916), Vol. 12, No. 1 (May, 1916), Vol. 12, No. 2 (June, 1916), Vol. 13, No. . (November 1916), Vol. 14, No. 1 (May, 1917), Vol. 15, No. 1 (November, 1917), Vol. 15, No. 2 (December 1917), Vol. 18, No. 3 (July, 1919), Vol. 19, No. 1 (November, 1919), Vol. 19, No. 6 (April, 1920), Vol. 20, No. 3 (July, 1920), Vol. 20, No. 4 (August, 1920), Vol. 21, No. 2 (December, 1920), Vol. 22, No. 2 (June, 1921), Vol. 22, No. 3 (July, 1921), Vol. 22, No. 4 (August, 1921), Vol. 22, No. 6 (October, 1921), Vol. 23, No. 4 (February, 1922), Vol. 23, No. 5 (March, 1922), Vol. 23, No. 6 (April, 1922), Vol. 24, No. 3 (July, 1922), Vol. 25, No. 1 (November, 1922), Vol 25. No. 3 (January 1923), Vol 26. No. 2. (June 1923), Vol 26. No. 3 (July 1923), Vol 26. No. 5. (September 1923), Vol 27. No. 1. (November 1923), Vol 28. No. 4. (August 1924), Vol 29. No 6 (April 1925), Vol 30. No. 3. (July 1925), Vol 30. No. 3 (July 1925), Vol. 30. No. 5 (September 1925), Vol 31. No. 1 (November 1925), (November 1928), Vol 36. No. 9. (September 1929), Vol 37. No. 3 (March 1930), Vol 37. No. 5 (May 1930), Vol 37. No. 6. (June 1930), Vol 37. No. 9 (September 1930), Vol. 39. No. 4 (April 1931), Vol 39. No. 5 (May 1931), Vol. 39. No. 7 (July 1931), Vol. 39. No. 8 (August 1932) Vol. 40. No. 8 (August 1933).

¹¹⁰ *Crisis*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (November, 1911), cover.



Figure 3.5



Figure 3.6

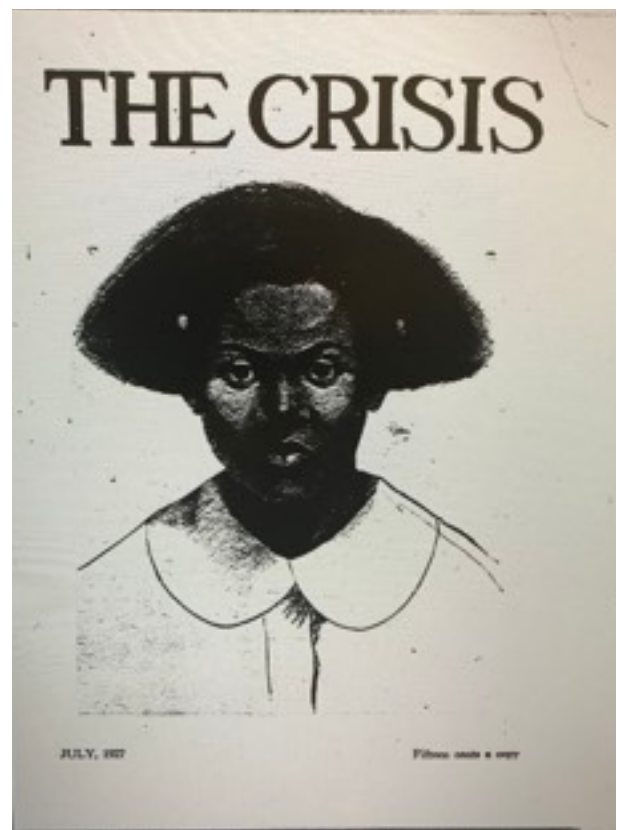


Figure 3.7

The fact that Du Bois more than once featured women who a college education is no accident; it merely highlights both Du Bois' ideal of the educated "talented tenth" who would uplift the "race", as well as the connection between class and skin tone. African Americans who had access to education usually belonged the wealthier middle-class, who in turn were often of lighter complexion because of their mixed heritage and closeness to the white middle class which had allowed them to become part of the middle class in the first place. A select few of the covers also featured celebrities or performers of the time. The August 1918 edition presents a Miss Bessie Moore as "Ethiopia" in the Trenton, N. J., School Pageant on its cover, followed several years later by another "Miss Ethiopia", Aida Gaines. The March 1930 cover, lastly, featured "Motion Picture Actress Nina Mae Mckinney", international film star of the 1930s. Because of racism in the American film industry, Mckinney soon after her appearance on the cover in the magazine moved to Europe where more opportunities for African American actors could be found, and where she was dubbed the "Black Garbo".

Of the 97 cover girls, only 18 feature women with "Afrotypic" appearance or darker complexion.¹¹¹ Two of these covers, those of August 1914 (fig. 3.5) and March of 1915, featured women significantly different from the light-complexioned women on other covers, not only because of their "Afrotypic" features, but also because of the fact that they were both older in age and sported clothing that would point towards them being part of the working class rather than the middle class most of the other women on the covers belonged to. This is interesting since as, Megan E. Williams points out, the *Crisis* had a clear tendency to "avoid cover images of overtly blue-collar woman", preferring instead to place women "who conformed to bourgeois standards of femininity" on their covers, reflecting the NAACP's middle class roots.¹¹² Also outside the general aesthetic

¹¹¹*Crisis*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (April, 1911). Vol. 8, No. 4 (August, 1914), Vol. 9, No. 5 (March, 1915), Vol. 11, No. 3 (January, 1916), Vol. 16, No. 1 (May, 1918), Vol. 16, No. 4 (August, 1918), Vol. 16, No. 5 (September, 1918), Vol. 19, No. 3 (January, 1920), Vol. 24, No. 4 (August, 1922), Vol 30. No. 1 (May 1925), Vol. 34. No. 3 (July 1927), (September 1928), Vol 36. No. 4 (April 1929), Vol 37. No. 4 (April 1930), Vol 37. No. 9 (September 1930), Vol 37. No. 8 (August 1930), Vol 40. No. 8 (August 1931), Vol 41, No. 2 (February 1934).

¹¹² Williams, "The Crisis Cover Girl", 227.

were the women on the covers of the January 1920 (fig. 3.6) and the May 1925 editions, who were both dressed in traditional folk clothing, and titled “Woman from Santa Lucia” and “A Moorish Maid”, respectively.¹¹³ The former of these two covers was explicitly mentioned by Du Bois when he was admonishing his “colored” colleagues against discriminating on the basis of color, or “colorism”, in the October 1920 issue of the magazine:

Our photograph of a woman from Santa Lucia , with its strength and humor and fine swing of head, was laughed at by many. Why? “O—er—it was not because they were black,” stammer some of my office companions, “but they are *too* black. No people were ever so--”Nonsense ! Do white people complain because their pictures are too white? They ought to, but they do not. Neither do we complain if we are photographed a shade “light”.¹¹⁴

A last unusual cover is the cover of the January 1916 issue. The cover titled “To the Highest Bidder” displayed a woman who was meant to portray a slave, standing in front of a sign stating “Auction Sale of Slaves”. Although these covers are a complete departure from the young women chosen to become the *Crisis* cover girls because of their beauty, there were, amongst the group of covers portraying “Afrotypic”, darker complexioned women, also images which slightly better aligned with the rest of the imagery. Two examples of these images are the May 1918 and the July 1927 (fig. 3.7) covers which displayed two lifelike drawings of beautiful dark-complexioned women sporting natural hair, without any type of hair straightening or wig, something very unusual compared to other imagery in the *Crisis*, in which an apparent preference for looser textured hair was visible. The actress and performer Aida Overton Walker was portrayed on the cover of the January 1915 issue. Overton Walker, also known as the queen of Cakewalk, was a vaudeville

¹¹³ *The Crisis Magazine*, editions; Vol. 19, No. 3. (January, 1920) and Vol 30. No. 1. (May 1925).

¹¹⁴ *The Crisis Magazine*, Vol. 20, no. 6 (October 1920), 266.

performer, famous for her cakewalk dance, which was inspired by the “prize walks” on black plantations in the late nineteenth century. Although her particular specialty of dance would deem otherwise, and seemed contrary to the New Negro Du Bois was attempting to create, Overton Walker in 1905 stated that her “profession” did “more toward the alleviation of color prejudice than any other profession among colored people.”¹¹⁵ The last of these dark-complexioned celebrities to be featured on the cover under Du Bois would be Victoria Spivey, “Motion Picture Actress”, but later most well known as blues singer and writer. Just like Overton Walker, Spivey also occasionally performed in vaudeville. Further, just as he had done with the lighter complexioned women, Du Bois also featured darker complexioned, “Afrotypic” college graduates in his August 1922, August 1930 and August 1931 issues.

Hence whilst positive representation amongst the women of darker complexion with “Afrotypic” features was not completely prejudiced, a strong preference for light-complexioned women is visible in the covers of the *Crisis Magazine* from 1910 until 1934. The numbers only make such an inclination evident, with only 18 women with “Afrotypic” featured on the covers against 79 women of lighter complexion or “Eurotypic” features and “passing” women, with no discernible “black features” at all. The fact that it is only the “Afrotypic” women who were portrayed in working-class or indigenous clothing makes clear just how far the construct of whiteness and its corresponding hierarchy of beauty has trickled down into the African American community. Where in mainstream America those of darker complexion were generally seen as lower in the hierarchy of beauty against the highest attainable whiteness, and through stereotyping often “othered”, Du Bois in his *Crisis* by choosing to barely feature women of darker complexion on the covers and then portraying only them in working class and indigenous clothing, inadvertently but definitively “othered” these “Afrotypic”, darker complexioned women within their own community.

¹¹⁵ *Colored American Magazine*, Volumes 8-9, 571.

Alluring Perfection



What is more charming than a ruby-mouth complexion of lovely, transparent rose-tinted skin with silken hair, lustrous, soft and gleaming?

Make this, beautify your own

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Figures 3.8-3.12

A similar preference for lighter complexioned Black women has also been shown in research on visual imagery in other magazines in later time periods. Two such studies are Lillie M. Fears in her 1998 article “Colorism of Black Women in News Editorial Photos” which I have referred to earlier, and a 1995 article by Michael Leslie, “Slow to fade?: Advertising in *Ebony* Magazine 1957-1989”. Although Fears in her research on news editorial photos in magazines found only marginal support for her hypothesis of overrepresentation of light-complexioned women, imagery of these women was indeed more often accompanied by descriptors referring to physical attractiveness.¹¹⁶ Michael Leslie, on the other hand, did find a strong preference for lighter complexioned women in the Black magazine, *Ebony* in the period from from 1957 until 1989. Significantly, Leslie found that the “Black Revolt of the 1960s” did influence the imagery in the magazine by “darkening” the models used. Such a change would not last long ,however, as by the late 1980s models used in the magazine would again reflect a light-complexioned beauty ideal.¹¹⁷ Hence, the practice of placing lighter complexioned women on the covers of the *Crisis* does not stand on its own; moreover this practice would continue in black news publications decades after the *Crisis* even started placing these women on the covers.

Apart from the magazine covers of the *Crisis*, a similar preference for light complexions also is evident in the advertisements in the magazine. Major companies catering to African American women at the time, among which Kashmir Chemical Co. and PORO in Chicago, and Mme C.J. Walker in Indianapolis, offered a plethora of skin care products. The women portrayed in the advertisements meant to sell these products were always of lighter complexions. A general aspiration of gaining a lighter skin color also revealed itself in the products sold. The most overt example of this is an advert in the November 1916 issue of the *Crisis* of Kashmir Chemical Co., in

¹¹⁶ Lilly M. Fears, “Black Women in News Editorial Photos”, 33.

¹¹⁷ Michael, Leslie. “Slow Fade to?: Advertising in Ebony Magazine, 1957–1989”, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (June 1, 1995), 426–35.

which a number of beauty supplies are mentioned, among which an actual skin whitener.¹¹⁸ Later beauty advertisements were, for example, Mme. C.J. Walker advertises for “Tan-Off, meant to “bleach out the blemishes in your skin”. By using the product, any woman could transform her skin: “Notice your skin today, your face, your hands, your neck. Mme. C.J. Walker’s Tan-Off will bleach them out, brighten them up, make them a clear, light part of your body you’ll be proud to show.”¹¹⁹ Mme C.J. Walker’s competition, PORO, would advertise its own vanishing cream, claiming that “No Woman Can Be Attractive Without a Beautiful Complexion”.¹²⁰ Advertisements for skin whiteners or bleachers were part of a much larger trend of skin whitening in African American society in order to conform to “Eurotypic” beauty standards. As previously quoted from the “passing” short story “High Yaller”:

there aren’t any more dark girls. Skin bleach and rouge have wiped out the strain. The blacks have turned sealskin, the sealskins are high-brown, the high-browns are all yaller, and the yallers are pink. How’s a bird gonna fall for what ain’t?¹²¹

A similar point is made by Amoaba Gooden and Jacob S. Dorman who point to the Black press for promoting a very limited “Eurotypic” beauty ideal connected to the African American middle class by actively advertising skin whiteners. In their view this limited beauty ideal was created to counter the racialized stereotypes imposed upon African Americans by their white counterparts.¹²²

¹¹⁸ *Crisis*, Vol. 13, No. 1. (Nov 1916).

¹¹⁹ *Crisis*, Vol. 37. No. 9 (September 1930), Vol. 37. No. 11 (November 1930), Vol. 37. No. 12 (December 1930).

¹²⁰ *Crisis*, Vol. 38. No. 1 (January 1931), Vol. 38. No. 2 (February 1931), Vol 38. No. 3 (March 1931).

¹²¹ *Crisis*, Vol 30. no 6. (October 1925), 282.

¹²² Amoaba Gooden, “Visual Representations of Feminine Beauty in the Black Press: 1915-1950”, *Journal of Pan African Studies*, June, 2011, Vol.4(4), 92. and Jacob S. Dorman, “Skin Bleach And Civilization: The Racial Formation of Blackness in 1920s Harlem”, *Journal of Pan African Studies*, June, 2011, Vol.4(4), 72.

Apart from products for “evening out” or rather whitening out the skin, starting from the early 1910s many companies started selling hair growth products supported by imagery of women with loose curl textures that are fairly uncommon among African Americans. Hair wigs, made from human hair, would also start becoming popular starting from 1916 on, made apparent by the rise in wig advertisements starting in 1916 but continuing until the end of Du Bois’ editorship. These wigs were meant to cover up natural “Afrotypic” kinky hair with hair that was more perceived to be “Eurotypic”, with again a much looser hair texture, mimicking white middle class beauty ideals.¹²³

However, it is important to note that although a distinct preference for Eurocentric beauty ideals is visible in the imagery of the *Crisis Magazine*, just as with the short stories on race and passing, to label the magazine as colorist would be simplistic. It is for that reason that in the ad pages of the magazine advertisements underlining both white and black beauty ideals can be found at the same time. An example of this is the June 1919 issue of the magazine where mere pages apart, an advertisement for a “skin whitener and cleanser” promoting a white beauty ideal and featuring an image of a woman of light complexion can be found,¹²⁴ as well as an advertisement for “Colored Dolls” produced by “a factory owned and controlled entirely by colored people” and created to implant “children pride of race and appreciation of race” and grant African American children a new positive image of black, affirming that “these are not the old time, black face, red lip aunt Jemima colored dolls but dolls well made and truly representative of the race in hair and features.”¹²⁵

Hence, as is visible in both the covers and advertisements in the *Crisis*, the magazine shows a strong preference for light- complexioned women, or tendency towards “colorism”. Exceptions can always be found, as exemplified in the natural hair doll adverts and the covers featuring darker

¹²³ Examples of the advertisements are; *Crisis* Vol. 14, No. 6. (October 1917), 324, Vol. 16, No. 3. (July, 1918), 152, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Dec 1919), 96, Vol. 20, No. 5 (Sep 1920), 255, Vol 29, No. 1 (Nov 1924), 45.

¹²⁴ *Crisis* Vol. 18, No. 2 (June, 1919), 120.

¹²⁵ *Crisis*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (June, 1919), 115.

complexioned women as college graduates or sporting natural hair, but in general the majority of the imagery in the *Crisis* displays a clear inclination towards women of light or sometimes even “white” complexion. Since the middle class readers of the magazine also often had light complexion, thus making the imagery somewhat representative of readership, the covers with mostly light-complexioned women and featuring extremely light complexioned, “white-looking” women alongside the beauty advertisements endorsing a similar beauty ideal through “skin-evening” products appear to work towards white beauty ideals rather than black beauty ideals within the African American community. Where Du Bois and the *Crisis* sought to recreate their own image of the negro in the “New Negro”, they in the end could not lose the trauma that white racialized framing had brought upon them. Out of fear to resemble the racist imagery of Black Americans in mainstream culture, they modeled the New Negro after white ideals of beauty. It is for this reason that women who were and appeared partially white were continuously celebrated as the standard of beauty, as exemplified by the poem on the cover of the November 1911 issue of the magazine that was discussed in chapter three:

The Quadroon

Daughter of Twilight,

Mothered of Midnight,

Fathered of Daylight and Dawn;

Shadow of Sunlight,

Shimmering Starlight,

Sister of Forest and Fawn!

Maid of a Morrow,

Mistress of Sorrow, Mingled of Mourning and Mirth;

Born of World Brotherhood,

Crowned of all Motherhood,

Beauty of Heaven and Earth!¹²⁶

¹²⁶ *Crisis*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (November 1911), cover.

In conclusion

Back beyond the world and swept by these wild, white faces of the awful dead, why will this Soul of White Folk,—this modern Prometheus,—hang bound by his own binding, tethered by a fable of the past? I hear his mighty cry reverberating through the world, "I am white!" Well and good, O Prometheus, divine thief! Is not the world wide enough for two colors, for many little shinings of the sun? Why, then, devour your own vitals if I answer even as proudly, "I am black!"¹²⁷

When W.E.B. Du Bois founded the *Crisis Magazine: A Record for the Darker Races*, a lifelong dream became a reality. Although the publication was primarily meant to deliver news, the magazine would deliver a great deal more. From its founding in 1910 until the end of his reign in 1934, Du Bois used the *Crisis* to routinely and successfully circulate his ideas among a larger audience. Starting with a readership of roughly one thousand in 1910, the magazine flourished under Du Bois, reaching a readership of over one hundred thousand in under ten years, by 1919. However, Du Bois would not only use the publication to spread his own writings and ideas. With the help of literary editor Jessie Fauset, he invited contributions by many writers who would become the foundation for the New Negro Movement or Harlem Renaissance, among whom Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes, and Jessie Fauset herself. Because of this, and the literary freedom the magazine afforded the authors, the *Crisis* itself would be at the heart of not only the literary expressions of the Movement, but of the New Negro Movement itself. In fact, the idea of creating the image of a New Negro to counter all the racialized stereotypes Black Americans had to endure for so many years, and to restore a sense of agency, was one of the major aims Du Bois kept in mind whilst producing a magazine issue each month. He would do so not only through his own writings and those of other gifted authors, but also through photos and images, his advocacy for

¹²⁷ Du Bois, *Darkwater*, 76.

college education connected to the idea of the “talented tenth”, and the creation of his Miss Ethiopia Pageant. The New Negro Du Bois was trying to create would be middle-class however, reflecting both his own background and the primary readership of the *Crisis*. Just like Du Bois himself, the magazine’s readership was mostly of lighter complexion indicative of the generally mixed ancestry of the Black American middle class, and the images in the magazine would reflect this.

This brings us to the main question I have examined in this thesis, namely: To what extent is the construct of “colorism” for African American women reflected in the imagery and writings of the *Crisis Magazine* from 1910 until 1934? As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, making use of primarily the writings and imagery in the *Crisis* and other important works by Du Bois such as *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (1903), *Darkwater: Voices within the Veil* (1920), and *Dusk of Dawn* (1940), a clear preference for light-complexioned women, or “colorism”, is most visible in the images in the *Crisis* represented by both the covers on and the advertisements in the magazine, with 79 of the 97 (81%) covers dedicated to light-complexioned women. Building upon the work of other scholars who have previously examined “colorism” in print, among which Megan Williams’ “The Crisis Cover Girl: Lena Horne, Walter White, and the NAACP’s Representation of African American Femininity”, Lily M. Fears’ “Black Women in News Editorial Photos” and Michael Leslie’s “Slow Fade to?: Advertising in *Ebony* Magazine, 1957–1989”, I have demonstrated that such a preference for lighter complexion is not unusual and fits in a larger tradition of “colorism” in Black print.

Hence, while Du Bois during the Harlem Renaissance or New Negro Movement worked tirelessly to recreate the image of black for both African American and White American audiences, he modeled the outward appearance of the New Negro after dominant “Eurotypic” ideals. This is not surprising when analyzed through the framework of critical race theory, proposed by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic in *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, and the related field of Whiteness Studies, which illustrate how whiteness as a norm influences the “other”, forcing the

“other” or in this case Black Americans, to model themselves after a white norm which becomes a white ideal. As Joe R. Feagin points out in *The White Racial Frame, Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing*, apart from this, the “other” is also awarded qualities and characteristics by the white norm. In the case of African Americans, these were revealed to be both racialized and racist, further alienating or “othering” the Black American from mainstream white America. Thus, in a effort to move away from these racist stereotypes, Du Bois and his *Crisis*, just like many others within the New Negro Movement, moved towards the beauty ideals of the group who had scorned and “othered” them by creating the negative characterizations in the first place. As Du Bois eloquently put it:

We are instinctively and almost unconsciously ashamed of the caricatures done of our darker shades. Black is caricature in our half conscious thought and we shun in print and paint that which we love in life. How good a dark face looks to us in a strange white city!¹²⁸

Thus, it appears as if Du Bois and his *Crisis* were influenced by beauty ideals created by a racial framework greater than himself.

Furthermore, making use of previous scholarship on “passing” in the literature of Harlem Renaissance, such as Cherene Sherrard-Johnson’s *Portraits of the New Negro Woman: Visual and Literary Culture in the Harlem Renaissance* and Maria Giulia Fabi’s *Passing and the Rise of the African American Novel*, I have demonstrated that the passing narrative was a subject regularly chosen by the writers of the Movement as a method to discuss the different “spaces” of “race” in America. This would explain why Du Bois did not make disproportionate use of the “passing” narrative in his magazine, other than for him and the authors to utilize the writings to point towards racial inequalities caused by the construct of “race” in America, as well as making it a venue to

¹²⁸ *Crisis*: Vol. 20, no. 6 (October 1920), 266.

discuss other issues connected to it such as class and identity. This is again contrary to both the covers featuring lighter complexioned women and the advertisements in the magazine, advocating not only a “Eurotypic” beauty ideal but also a potentially dangerous method to achieve it, namely skin whitening. Thus the literary and visual expressions of the *Crisis* appear continually in contradiction. Nowhere clearer is this in the June 1919 issue of the magazine where advertisements for skin whitening and for colored dolls created to teach children a new positive image of blackness are mere pages apart.

In the end Du Bois, after a continuous decrease of the magazine’s subscriptions due partially to the Depression, clashes with the editorial board and leadership of the NAACP, which culminated in a number of articles in which he would advocate to fight segregation with segregation, was eventually forced to resign in 1934. Du Bois left behind a legacy stretching to almost a quarter century. He was able to successfully and irrevocably change the current of civil rights activism from accommodationist to militant. Moreover, his ideas about “race”, such as the concept of double consciousness still inform present-day theories of race.

As W.E.B. Du Bois famously stated, the problem of the twentieth century was “the color-line, - “the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.”¹²⁹ Seventy years later Alice Walker would speak of a different color line, one concerning “the relations between the darker and lighter people of the same races, and of the women who represent both dark and light within each race.”¹³⁰ Now has come the time to free ourselves from the lines that separate us. As Du Bois put it,

¹²⁹ Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk*, 13.

¹³⁰ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*, 248.

Off with these thought-chains and inchoate soul-shrinkings, and let us train ourselves to see beauty in black. ¹³¹

¹³¹ *The Crisis Magazine*, edition: Vol. 20, no. 6 (October 1920), 266.

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