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The Afro-American

W. E. Burghardt Du Bois

1 In a third class continental railway carriage, my neighbors at first stare at me—sometimes a bit impudently, sometimes with an inquisitive smile. I have grown so used to this that I can sit quietly for an hour or so with from three to six pairs of eyes focused on my brown face, my closely curled hair, my hat, my clothes, my hands and the visible part of my soul, without betraying any considerable impatience. After satisfying their eyes and becoming more or less assured that I am neither wild nor a member of a passing circus, one of the bolder ones usually seeks to open a conversation, through the weather, the speed of the train, the window, or some such railway topic. It depends of course on my mood as to whether the conversation is particularly successful. Sometimes when there are not many with us, and my neighbor is pleasant and gentlemanly, I let the talk run on, well knowing whither it will eventually drift. I agree that the weather is pleasant, that the open window is to my taste, *et cetera*.

2 My friend then generally sees fit to compliment my accent and says:

“Your native tongue is—?”

“English.”

Here comes always the first look of surprise. Oh! he thought I spoke French, or Spanish, or Arabian.

“You are then from English India?”

“No, I am an American.”

“Ah, yes—South American of course; I’ve a cousin—”

“No, I’m from the United States, North America.”

“Indeed, but I thought—were you born there, may I ask?”

“Yes, and my father, my grand father and my great grand father.”

“Is that so! Excuse me, I had thought from your color that—”

“I am of Negro descent.”

3 In this manner it gradually dawns upon my inquisitive friend that he is face to face with a modern “problem.” He recollects the emancipation of several millions of slaves in the United States some years ago, and he has since heard more or less of the trouble which naturally followed with this horde of partially civilized freedmen. In common, however, with the rest of the European world he had always thought of these people in the third person, and had no more imagined himself discussing this race problem with one of them, than he had

planned talking Egyptology with a pyramid. The curiosity of my neighbor, therefore increases. He hesitates at openly prying into my private affairs or into such public ones as may be painful to me. Yet he is interested, for here, says he is a young man whose very existence is a kind of social paradox: removed but a couple of generations from barbarism, he is yet no barbarian; and again though to all appearances the civilized member of a civilized state, he represents the 19th century problem of barbarism.

4 I am not always unwilling to satisfy my friend's curiosity. Yes, I tell him, I am one of those nine million human beings in the United States, who constitute the so-called "Negro Problem." The majority of us are not of pure Negro blood, and therefore, as a people, cannot be described as Negroes; neither we nor our ancestors for generations were born in Africa and thus we are not African. We describe ourselves by the perhaps awkward, but certainly more accurate term of Afro-American. If, now, the interest of my neighbor still continues, I proceed to enlarge on a subject which naturally lies near my heart.

1.

5 The European child is born into one of several superimposed worlds; he sees in the various social grades and walks of life, so many different and more or less completely separated spheres to only one of which he belongs, and from which he views the others as so many strange and unknown planets. With the white American child, the case is not so different as many democrats would have men believe. With the Afro-American the case is quite different; he is born into a universe which in addition to all horizontal boundaries is separated by a straight perpendicular fissure into a white and black hemisphere. These two halves both have their horizontal differences of educated and ignorant, rich and poor, law abiding and criminal. On the black side these grades are not, to be sure, so highly differentiated, and the average of culture is far below that of the white side, still they are adjacent and not superimposed spheres.

6 This fissure between white and black is not every where of the same width. Naturally it is the widest in the former slave states and narrowest in the older and more cultivated East. It seldom, however, wholly closes up in New England, while its threatening width in the south is the "Negro Problem." Thus Whittier's "Black Boy of Atlanta" had a peculiar world in which to "rise." Born to ex-slaves, he was reared of necessity, in a physically and morally unhealthy home,—a home such as two hundred and fifty years of ruthless serfdom had left in a legacy to the freedmen. For his education he had himself no means, and those furnished by the State were in inverse proportion to his needs, the State following the peculiarly American principle that the poorest and most ignorant of her citizens should have the worst and shortest schools, since, forsooth, they paid the least taxes. The natural expense of schools was, in the South, increased by the maintenance of two systems, a black and a white, the white schools were and are bad, but nothing deserving the name of a school system for the blacks has existed until within the last ten or fifteen years, and remains to-day glaringly inadequate. This is,

of course, to be expected in a land lately devastated by war, and upheaved by a mighty social revolution. The unaided efforts of the South to recover, laudable though they have been in many instances, have naturally failed as yet adequately to cope with the vast problem of ignorance before it.

7 If our black boy is so fortunate as to secure a common school education—a thing desirable for the humblest citizen of a republic, and absolutely necessary for one with such antecedents as the Afro-American—the question of a life-calling is, for him, beset with peculiar difficulties. His ability has little chance to display itself, for the majority of Americans refuse his entrance into the various walks of life on any terms. What American would buy of a black merchant, even if he sold honest wares? What “Knight of Labor” would take a black apprentice? What white Trade-unionist would labor beside a black craftsman? What is the black boy’s chance of getting the use of capital for business on a large scale? The higher the black youth aspires the greater his peculiar difficulties. He is often barred from professional schools, he is discriminated against in salaries, and ostracised [sic] professionally by his white brothers.

8 The easiest thing for him to do is to sink into the old menial positions, which are, in American eyes, his ideal condition, and give up the struggle to raise himself to the heights he so thoroughly believes himself capable of attaining. Of course, if he be of heroic build, he will surmount all obstacles and break a new path amid the thorn of prejudice, and underbrush of ignorance: thus in spite of the difficulties I have mentioned, we have no small number of successful skilled laborers, tradesmen, teachers and professional men. The Afro-American is, however, no exception to the rule that most human beings are not heroes and waymakers, and need a certain minimum amount of encouragement to make them put forth their best efforts.

9 His calling chosen, and settled in life, the young Colored man still finds his life-path strictly hedged in. He marries most generally only one of his own race; he has difficulty in hiring or buying a house except in certain quarters of the city; in the south he is generally debarred from public libraries, theatres (save perhaps in the “pit”), lecture courses, white churches, etc., and from hotels, cafés, restaurants, and the like. On the railway he is confined to separate and poor apartments, or to the smoking-car. His wife and daughters are especially liable to insult and outrage, both by law and custom, while if the slightest suspicion arise that he has in any way insulted a white woman, he is liable to be hanged or burned without judge, jury, or the vestige of a trial. At law, he is not tried by his peers but always by a jury wholly or nine-tenths white, and by a white judge. His right to vote is, to a large extent, throughout the south rendered null and void. These discriminations may, in some cases, be merely protective measures of society against its proletariat—of civilization against the vast underlying strata of black barbarism. They change this character however, when they force back rising talent and desert among blacks, and leave uncurbed ignorance and lawlessness among whites. Even the boy born, as I was, in¹ Puritan New England, finds that nearly all the paths of advancement opened to his white brothers are, by strong custom, sternly shut in his face. The difference between north and south in this

respect is indeed great, but rather one of degree than of kind, and in Boston as well as New Orleans, the Afro-American must in his own country, feel himself the unwelcome guest at the national meal.

10 What is the underlying theory of this attitude of the American State toward one seventh of her citizens?

2.

11 Three schools of thought may be said to represent the attitude of the American State toward its citizens of African descent, which I may designate as the Ricardean, the Philanthropic and the Radical. The school which has hitherto been dominant is the Ricardean, i.e., the school which seeks to apply the principles of the Rousseau-Smith-Ricardo school of social philosophy to the solving of the race problem. Its creed was simple—emancipate the slave, give him neither land, tools, nor money, and leave him to the mercy of his former masters to work out his own salvation by “free competition” with the American freemen. It is safe to say that this was the most extreme application of the Smith-Ricardo economics ever made in a civilized State. The situation violated every condition which the English school of social philosophy presupposed as necessary for the application of their laws. Instead of a stable state of society, an absence of great class differences and prejudices, and an approximate equality of opportunity for the competitors, there was a state of society only to be described as revolutionary, a maximum of class hatred and unreasoning prejudice, and the competing “equality” of master and slave. Scarce a single step was taken by the State to remedy this. The ballot was given to the ignorant and bewildered freedmen, and promptly rendered null and void by the Ex-Masters in sheer self-defense. Russia, to whom America has often thought it fit to read lectures on national morality, gave the emancipated serfs a part of the land on which they and their fathers had toiled: not an inch was given America’s freedmen; the builders of the monarchic Prussian state took care that the ignorant German bauer was in a condition to compete before he was left to “free competition”: the democratic American state did not give its freedmen so much as a spade.²

12 It is hard to say what the result of this remarkable policy would have been, had not the private efforts of philanthropists in some measure, hindered its radical application, the patient stubborn striving of the freedmen accomplished unawaited results, and the white showed itself more friendly to the blacks than the freedmen had expected.

13 These efforts of the philanthropists were in accordance with the second school of thought in America in regard to this problem. This, like the first, is a child of the 18th century—a development of those one-sided moral and social ideals which made man purely the result of his individual environment. These new-world philanthropists have indeed, behind their Browns, their Garrisons, and their Sumners, striven for the highest ideals of humanity; but at the same time they have seldom escaped narrow fanaticism or great-hearted blindness to facts. Seizing upon the Rousseau-Jefferson half-truth: “All men are created free and

equal,” they sought to secure the rise of the Negro by a course at College, and the recognition of his rights by legal enactment, or executive dicta. Here naturally, they largely failed. Their laws remained dead-letters, their mandates were hooted down by the mob, while the vast system of private charity which they set on foot to aid the helpless and forsaken freedmen was without general plan, expensively distributed and, [sic] shortsighted in its object. The whole philanthropic movement in regard to the Afro-American forgot the real weakness of his situation, i.e., his economic helplessness and dependence; that whatever “equality” he could be said to hold in the American state, was an equality in “poase” [sic] and not in “ease.”³ It gave him churches before he had homes, theories of equality instead of personal property, theological bickerings instead of land and tools, and mushroom “colleges” instead of a good common school and industrial training system. In spite, however, of all mistakes and all narrowness this philanthropy did a mighty work; and has been the agency, which in the face of the indifference and neglect of the State, supplied the ex-slave that aid which was indispensable to his advance. Not indeed the sole agency, for the southern people themselves have of late years given thousands of dollars through their legislatures to common-school and industrial education, and in some instances to higher education among the freedmen. This has been done at times grudgingly and in an illiberal spirit but nevertheless the facts speak most for the broader spirit of the South. The Nation has wrongly laid on this part of the country the whole responsibility of removing ignorance and degradation caused by slavery. That under such an unfair and short-sighted policy, the south should have been able to rise above her prejudices against Negro blood, and to build and equip a dozen or more normal and industrial schools in addition to a common-school system, even though that be poor, certainly deserves commendation; this what we Afro-Americans would be the last to withhold. Nevertheless even now Northern charity does the larger part of this work. Time has broadened the aims of these philanthropists, systematized and made practical their plans: the movement however, still remains a huge work of highest importance built on the narrow vacillating and humiliating basis of personal charity. The better self of the American people has not yet realized that this situation is something more complicated than a case of pariah almsgiving; and for this reason there has shown itself in later years a certain dissatisfaction with the total results of this 20 years of spasmodic charity. The more short-sighted of its promoters, with the American impatience of anything but quick and big “returns,” are perplexed because the half-hearted efforts of two decades have not settled a social problem of the 250 years growth. Quick, thorough, radical, methods of “settling” the problem, have lately found increasing favor with such people, as well as with those who have ever honestly believed the Negro an inferior being, incapable of any considerable elevation.

14 The grand thought of this radical school of opinion lies on the oft-repeated phrase: “This is a white man’s country,” i.e., in all questions affecting the weal or woe of America, the only people whose interests are to be considered are the members of the Caucasian race. This 15th century phrase is stated baldly and

bluntly by some classes; by others it is dressed in 19th century clothes; it is said: We are dealing with facts, not theories of morality; there is among us a vast horde of people, alien to us in looks, in blood, in morals and in culture; our people will not associate with them, and cannot live in peace beside them; they stand on a lower plane of humanity than we, and never have in the past evolved a civilization of their own, nor under a favorable trial today do they show any ability to assimilate or forward modern culture; therefore as a lazy, shiftless, and bestial folk, they must in accordance with the universal law of the survival of the fittest yield before the all-conquering Anglo-Saxon, and must be either transported, isolated or left to slow and certain extermination.

15 This is the attitude of many Americans and Europeans toward the Afro-American. It is an attitude that assumes, with one stroke of the pen, an answer to nearly every social question which this great problem presents. With little or no attempt at proof, it takes for granted:

- (a) That the present attitude of the American people toward the Colored race is a fixed and unchangeable fact, not a prejudice of the day.
- (b) That the Afro-American has, since the emancipation, made no appreciable advance, either economic, mental, or moral.
- (c) That he never has, and never will, do anything to aid and advance the culture and civilization of the day.

16 Far from such a series of sweeping assumptions being generally admitted as true, the very opposite of them have received wide-spread credence: that, for instance, the Negro-hatred in America was a cruel and groundless prejudice, which had already dropped its more glaring absurdities, and bade fair in time to disappear; that the progress of the Afro-Americans since emancipation in morals, education, and wealth, has been most remarkable, and that too, in spite of the unusual hindrances which prejudice and neglect placed in their way. These assertions have been strengthened by facts and figures, and whatever they lack of absolute scientific proof may possibly be due to the slipshod method in which the United States collects its statistics.

17 At all events, the very circumstance that at this late day, after decades of discussion, the main facts of the problem are so little known as even to allow the serious assertion of so important a doubt, is an eloquent commentary on the methods in which the American people are settling their social problems. Here lies, of course, the kernel [sic] of the whole problem: to ascertain by careful statistics, historical research and scientific inquiry, the actual facts of the case in order that out of the chaos of opinion, allegation, and prejudice, the real truth and the real problems may be laid bare.

18 Meantime one of the most important elements of the problem is without doubt, the attitude of the Afro-American himself, his opinion of his situation, his aspirations, and ideals. For it is the peculiarity of problems in social science, as

distinguished from physical science, that the thing studied as well as the student, is a living breathing soul, all of whose numberless thoughts and actions must be ascertained and allowed for in the final answer.

3.

19 The peculiarity of the rise of the Afro-American is that he has been compelled to advance by means of democracy toward ideals which American democracy has set before him. The invariable rule of advance among peoples is the gradual evolving of leading, ruling classes among them, who guide the masses, and incorporate strata after strata with themselves until a sufficient number of the whole race become raised to that average of culture which we call civilization. So to place a nation that this usual method of advance was hindered, did not mean the substitution of some new method—it did not result as 18th century social philosophers taught, in the lifting of the race bodily from the bottom into one dead level of equality; it merely [*sic*] meant that the natural development should be slower, and the natural aristocracy longer deprived of their rightful places as leaders of their own people. Thus it has happened that the majority worship and deification of mob-rule, which has too often in America displaced the high ideals of true democracy, has within the ranks of the freedmen themselves, acted as a disintegrating force at a time when unity and subordination was most needed. They were, directly after emancipation, like sheep without a shepherd. The cleft of race prejudice forbade that the better classes of the whites should assume that legitimate leadership and beneficent guardianship which the cultured classes of all nations owe their proletariat [*sic*]. The ex-slave was compelled, out of the dead-level of his degradation to evolve his leaders and his ideals. It was indeed impossible that these ideals should not be in great degree influenced by the ideals of the American State: and these were such as bewildered and confused the freedmen. He shrank instinctively from that soul-blunting competition, that *Sturm und Drang* of the gigantic business life, as the great cause of all the disabilities and indignities he suffered. All this in turn increased the prejudice against him: for those busy, restless Americans who are apt to rate sharpness higher than honesty, brilliancy higher than faithfulness, and dollars higher than God—such Americans had only contempt for the true-heartedness of the slave to his master, for the trusting and simplicity that allows the sharper merchant and land owner to cheat at will the black farmer and tenant, and a general smile of pity for the ex-slaves light-hearted joyousness, his vein of peculiar melancholy, his religious mysticism and respect for authority in fine for all those characteristics which American “business” methods have never found “profitable.”

20 It thus happened that the Afro-American, suddenly broken with his past and out of touch with his environment, despised and ridiculed, cheated and abused, bade fair at first, to develop into a nation ashamed of itself, seeking to escape its own identity even through bastardy, apeing every enormity of the dominant race, and losing that self-respect, which must lie at the bottom of all

human advance. The first awakening to race-consciousness lay in the natural attempt to use his own legacy and means of power, the ballot, to better his condition. He espoused with fullest faith the weakest side of the philanthropic movement in his behalf, and sought to legislate himself into to the promised land of civil equality. He not only failed in this attempt, as was natural, but in the hands of demagogues and tricksters became the tool for that post-bellum corruption and misrule in the south, which the perspicuity of many American social philosophers still persist in ascribing to Negro "inferiority." Slowly and painfully the freedmen's sons have withdrawn themselves more from such political efforts and addressed themselves to the ground problem, the economic situation.

21 When now it is asked what is the Afro-American's opinion of his situation? It must not be expected that at this stage of development, when all is in rapid change, any generally recognized carefully stated set of opinion, is to be found. The ideals and guiding lines of thought reflect the undeveloped and plastic condition of this people, at a day when their true aristocracy, their true leaders, are hardly recognized as such among their own people. Nevertheless such an aristocracy—such a saving remnant exists, and their opinion, I make bold to state as I understand it.

4.

22 We Afro-Americans claim that the United States has made the dangerous mistake of calling a mass of complicated social problems which lay before the nation, by the common name of "Negro Problem," and of then attempting to find some one radical remedy for all such distresses.

23 We claim to see under what is commonly called the Negro problem at least four different problems; We regard the Negro problem proper as nothing more nor less than a question of humanity and national morality. Is the American nation willing to judge, use, and protect its citizens with reference alone to their character and ability, and irrespective of their race and color? Is the conscience of the American Republic so far behind the social ideals of the 19th century, as to deny to a human being the right of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" solely because he has Negro blood? This is the kernel of the Negro problem, and the question which the American people have never boldly faced, but have persisted in veiling behind other and dependent problems. For instance, it is often said: the Afro-American is ignorant and cannot therefore be treated as other citizens, but this is not the Negro problem, for every American knows that there are thousands of Negro descent in America, who are not ignorant, and the question is, how are they to be treated? True it is that a much larger per-cent of the Afro-Americans are illiterate than of the whites, and this is to be expected. None however, can read the reports of the commission of education, and of the great benevolent associations without being struck with their remarkable betterment in this respect, since emancipation; we claim that it can be proven that the problem of illiteracy among us is no peculiar one but part and parcel of the vaster problem of ignorance that faces this immigrant-loving nation. It raises

the great question as to how much longer the United States can in deference to its Manchester economics, leave the great question of the education of its citizens entirely to local control, and thus increase and intensify present evils by giving the worst schools to the poorest and most ignorant communities.

24 This brings us to the second problem which so often cloaks and confuses the race question; it is the political problem. An involuntary murmur of approval goes through the civilized world when the South says: we will not allow ourselves to be ruled by a horde of ignorant voters — intelligence must assert its legitimate sway over barbarism. We Afro-Americans can too express hearty sympathy with this. The majority of colored voters in the south are not fit to have the ballot and the carrying out of the rule of “one man, one vote” south of the Mason and Dixon line today would merely mean the subversion of civilized government. But here we say again, this is no Negro question, for although the greater number of ignorant voters in the south are those of Negro blood, yet no small number of white voters are just as ignorant and just as unfit to rule. In other words it is ignorance and not blackness which menaces civilization in the south. This is shown in the badly governed parts of the north, where the ignorance and venality of white voters made government so often corrupt and ridiculous. Again, we claim that Afro-American citizens who are capable of performing the duties of citizenship, and they are no small number, should be listened to in the councils of the nation and as jealously guarded in their rights as white citizens. Although we have, in a way, more excuse for our condition than our brothers in white still we do not for a moment defend ignorance and immorality in politics: but we do vehemently protest, when the plea of incapability is used to disfranchise a vast number of intelligent and law-abiding black voters, while, at the same time millions of ignorant white voters are allowed to make the name of democracy a stench in the nostrils of civilization and decency. This whole question is part of the great problem of the future of political life in America. Already the nation has gone so far in its blind worship of democracy, that it is today ruled more from its gutters than from its homes. Is it not about time to stop, turn about and limit the franchise which has been so inconsiderately distributed? This must be done soon unless the intelligence and morality of America really intend to abdicate to ignorance and mob-rule.

25 The imputation that hurts us most personally, and most mystifies our friends and the social student, is that our condition in America is due to our laziness and immorality. This is the most serious charge that could be brought against a struggling people, and one [sic] from its intangible nature, is most difficult to prove or disprove. It goes without saying that the slave regime left us a terrible legacy. For two centuries the nation strained every nerve, economic, legal and moral, to make us merely beasts of burden; they made us improvident, dependent, and lewd: sought to discourage all enterprise and all effort to advance; and by reducing our women to concubinage and degrading the marriage tie, they almost destroyed the institution of the family. Twenty five years have not obliterated the effect of these, the most terrible wounds a race can suffer. And yet, notwithstanding this, emancipation did not result in lazy, lawlessness: the

great proof of this, is the fact of the wonderful economic improvement of the south under free black labor. This whole land has taken such wonderful economic strides since the war, that the phrase "New South" is in the mouth of all social students; and yet all this was accomplished chiefly by the aid of Negro labor. The family life of the Afro-American is vastly purer and better than even a decade ago, although it is still to a large extent immoral. That the lowest strata have been guilty of the frightful crime of rape to the extent alleged by crazed and irresponsible mobs cannot be true: such testimony in a land where the cohabitation of a black man and a white woman although married, is a crime, must be regard with suspicion. Nevertheless we know that this terrible crime can too often rightly be laid at our door. This, we deeply and heartily deplore: yet we are bound to say that if the chastity of black women has better legal and moral support in the south, if black wives and daughters were less liable to insult and outrage at the hands of white rascals, the other crime would greatly decrease. It cannot be proven that our record in this respect is more than among other races of the same degree of advancement, and the nation that stamped bastardy on us in our helplessness can ill afford not to point the finger of shame, if we have proven too apt pupils.

26 To sum up: We Afro-Americans acknowledge freely that we form a larger part of those many social problems that confront the American nation; we must educate ourselves, we must learn our duties as voters, we must raise our moral standards; and we are striving to do all this: few peoples have ever striven more earnestly to gain the respect of civilization than we in the last quarter-century – [sic]. In some lines we have succeeded, in some, not; part of our lack of success is due to our own short-comings: we acknowledge this and will strive to remedy the disease [sic]. But God and the American people know the greatest and most discouraging obstacle in our paths has been, and still is, that unreasoning and unreasonable prejudice of this nation, which persists in rating the ignorant and vicious white man above the intelligent and striving Colored man, under any and all circumstances. This fact constitutes the Negro problem. It is purely a moral question, and one which the nation cannot much longer elude and disguise. It may indeed be regretted that the situation has arisen: that is however, not our fault, nor the fault of our fathers. Forcibly and rudely they were brought here, and here we, their children, who have toiled, fought and bled for this land, propose to stay. Nine millions of people cannot by human or divine justice be asked to make themselves the scape-goats for the sins of a light-headed nation.

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Notes

This essay is previously unpublished in print form. It can be found as “The Afro-American,” 1894–1896, Papers of W. E. B. Du Bois, Special Collections and University Archives, Series 3, Subseries C, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst. It is published here with the permission of the David Graham Du Bois Trust, copyright David Graham Du Bois Trust, all rights reserved. The essay was edited for publication by Nahum D. Chandler. The numbers in bold on the far left of the first line of each paragraph have been added by the editors for reference and citation; however, the numbers indicating the major sections of the essay as a whole are found on the original typescript.

¹ The preceding phrase “Even the boy born, as I was, in” is inscribed in this place on the original in hand script on a partially blank line that appears to have been reserved for it.

² On the original typescript, the word “chance” is crossed through and the word “spade” is written next to it in hand script.

³ The typescript has the word “poase” here. However, this word, if it is such, is perhaps a typographical error, for there is a famous saying that is attributed to Benjamin Franklin: “He that would live in peace and at ease, / Must not speak all he knows, nor judge all he sees.” Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard, 1736. An Almanack for the Year of Christ 1736, . . .*, by Richard Saunders (Philadelphia: Printed and sold by B. Franklin, at the new printing-office near the market, 1735), available through the Papers of Benjamin Franklin, intro. Edmund S. Morgan, American Philosophical Society and Yale University, digital ed. by Packard Humanities Institute, 2006, <http://franklinpapers.org/franklin//framedVolumes.jsp>. It is plausible that Du Bois is inverting the meaning of such a phrase by suggesting that the African American has a form of legal equality with other American citizens after the American Civil War and hence is at peace, but his condition is not a state of “ease.” If so, the inscription “poase” should read as the word “peace.” As the words “poase” and “ease” are both in quotation marks, this transposition seems plausible.