

History 600: Topics in U.S. History - Du Bois for Today

SYLLABUS

“As we grow...let us take the first opportunity of studying the histories and cultures of Asia, Australia, and the early history and culture of America and let us expand the study we now attempt to make of the history and culture of Africa, to the end that our work in the social sciences may present the relevant past, not to minds living in the past but to the minds of those who will live and shape the world of the future.” [W. E. B. Du Bois, 1940.]

W. E. B. Du Bois, African American journalist, activist, historian, sociologist, poet, novelist, and playwright, was a cultural giant whose work is constantly being reevaluated. Du Bois's impact on contemporary intellectual life is extensive. He is valued as a literary figure whose contributions to American letters have yet to be fully probed, and as a cultural analyst whose perceptive studies of race relations are still widely consulted by contemporary social scientists, literary critics, and theorists. Du Bois's long life, spanning Reconstruction through civil rights protest in the early 1960s, is in many respects a microcosm of the modern period and encompasses the most dramatic events of the 20th century. As an activist as well as an intellectual, Du Bois helped shape many of these events. The 21st century is still harvesting this polymath's rich insights. This Du Bois colloquium will focus on four themes in Du Bois's life and work: race, gender, imperialism, and culture.

Organization. The class format features lectures, discussion, and student-initiated presentations. Students will work on a seminar paper based on research they have done on Du Bois's published writings and/or his papers. As Du Bois's interests were widely ranging, students have a wide choice of what to study. They can focus on that aspect of Du Bois they find most engaging and that has pertinence for today's issues. Students will share the results of their work with other students in class meetings, and submit the paper at the end of the course. More on the technical aspects of writing the paper will be covered in a separate handout. Warning: The reading load is heavy, and Du Bois is not always an easy author.

Evaluation. Attendance will be kept for each class session. There is a reason for this. Attendance is critically important for a class in which the professor does not lecture and in which student participation is a key element. Engaged students learn more. As students are responsible for each meeting's work, they are expected to be on time. Grades will be based on the following:

1) Organizing class discussion. A pair of students will chair one discussion on the collective readings, and both will receive the same grade (15%). Additionally, each student will deliver one briefing on his or her own research subject (15%). (Checklists on how to do these assignments will be distributed separately.) Note that as the class calendar turns on students making their presentations as scheduled, failure to do so without a compelling reason will result in a lowered grade.

2) Annotated bibliography and book review. Each student will submit an annotated bibliography and a book review (or 3 articles from scholarly journals). These projects support the final research paper. An annotated bibliography is one that includes notes that describe the books or articles in question. The annotated bibliography, which must be submitted but will not be graded,

consists of works the student is consulting for his or her paper. The book review will discuss a book written by or about Du Bois other than the required course text, and will constitute 30% of the grade. A handout on how to write these will be distributed separately.

3) Research paper. A research paper worth 40% of the total grade. A handout on how to write this will be distributed separately.

4. Attendance. Anyone can have up to 8 unexcused absences (i.e., one month of classes) without penalty. Students who are members of teams, or involved with University-sponsored activities that may occasionally take them away from class, should provide a schedule of their absences to their professors. Students with constant schedule conflicts, or those who have difficulty gearing up for morning classes, should make a decision about whether to take the course. Those otherwise missing more than 8 class sessions cannot earn more than a C in the course. As per university regulations, there is no penalty for religious observances.

Classroom policies. Mutual respect for divergent viewpoints is essential for productive class discussions. Class discussions can be lively and intense, but they must be diplomatic. Thoughtfully assess an idea; don't attack the person expressing it. Please turn off cell phones, pagers, and other noisemakers while in class, and enter and leave the room quietly at the beginning and end of the session. Laptops are useful adjuncts to learning, but they have proven to be a distraction in the classroom setting. Please do not use laptops in this class for any purpose. Newspaper reading, text messaging, and dozing mean lost learning opportunities. Extensions on written assignments must be requested 48 hours in advance of due dates. There are no extensions on presentations.

Special needs students. Students who need accommodations for a disability will be accommodated and should make their requests as early in the semester as possible.

Textbooks. Books for purchase are at the Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative, 426 W. Gilman St. Texts owned by campus libraries are on reserve. The following are required:

W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess: A Romance* (University Press of Mississippi, 1995)
 W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* - multiple editions and available on-line
 David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (Henry Holt & Company or Waldenbooks, 1997) – volume 1 only
 Course packet of reading available on LearnUW

Contact with professor: I have an office in the History Department and another in Afro-American Studies. My Afro-American Studies office is on the 4th floor of Helen C. White, and is the first one on the left as you enter the Afro-American Studies wing. Due to staff shortages, e-mail is better than leaving phone messages. My e-mail address is bplummer@wisc.edu. You are automatically subscribed to the class list if you are registered. The list address is: history600-13-f14@lists.wisc.edu. If you haven't received any mail from the class list by the end of the second week of the semester, please let me know. Students should also feel free to use the list to communicate with one another and share information about the course. E-mail is not a substitute, however, for class attendance and participation.

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COURSE CALENDAR

Sept. 4: Introduction to the course

Sept. 11: Today's readings: Lewis, preface, chs. 1-3; *Souls*, Forethought and ch. 1

Questions for discussion: Does the double consciousness theme have relevance for the modern world? What is Du Bois's take on slavery and emancipation? What is the impact of the profound segregation in American life on the development of Americans of all races? The experience of being one of a few black people in a community still occurs today. How did Du Bois experience this and how do people experience this today? What is the meaning of the "Veil" and does it have resonance for today's society?

Sept. 18: Today's readings: Lewis, chs. 4-5; *Souls*, ch. 2; "Conservation of Races" in the course pack

Questions for discussion: How does today's rural South deviate from Du Bois's portrait? In what ways was Fisk a revelation to Du Bois? How has thinking on race changed since the late 19th century? Is thought on the subject still evolving? With regard to the questions above, what might Du Bois mean by "conservation?"

Sept. 25: Today's readings: Lewis, chs. 6-7; *Souls*, ch. 3; "Immortal Child" in the course pack

Questions for discussion: Have Booker T. Washington's ideas survived in any form into the present? What shape are black children in today? What has and has not changed? What does Du Bois see as special in Coleridge-Taylor and what lessons does he draw from his life? Why didn't Du Bois like Wilberforce College? What are the implications for black higher education?

Oct. 2: Today's readings: Lewis, chs. 8-10; *Souls*, ch. 4; "Universal Races Congress" in the course pack

Questions for discussion: Why was the Universal Races Congress an important event in the history of the social sciences? What is the relationship of the social sciences to questions of race and ethnicity today? Why are the Philadelphia and Atlanta University studies important?

Proposed paper topic due

Oct. 9: Today's readings: Lewis, chs. 11-12; *Souls*, ch. 5

Questions for discussion: What does Du Bois have to say about class and wealth among African Americans? What role(s) does class play in African American communities today? What did Atlanta represent to Du Bois? What are some aspects of African American relations with cities?

Oct. 16: MIDTERM BREAK. No class meeting. Catch up on readings if needed.

Oct. 23: Today's readings: Lewis, chs. 13-14; *Souls*, ch. 6; "Damnation of Women" and "Woman Suffrage" in the course pack

Questions for discussion: What is Du Bois's general attitude toward historically black colleges and universities? What role(s) do these institutions play today? Was Du Bois a feminist? Which issues related to women that he discusses have contemporary pertinence? Do these remain controversial? How do we reconcile Du Bois's views with his personal life? What were the circumstances under which the NAACP was founded? How has it changed?

Oct. 30: Today's readings: Lewis, chs. 15-17; *Souls*, ch. 7; "Criteria of Negro Art" in course pack

Questions for discussion: Did Du Bois believe in art for art's sake or did he believe it should always convey a positive message? Which trends in African American art did he like and what did he reject? What influenced him in these preferences? How did Du Bois's editorship of *The Crisis* foreshadow contemporary challenges faced by black journalism?

Annotated bibliography due

Nov. 6: Today's readings: Lewis, chs. 18-19; *Souls*, ch. 8; *Dark Princess*, Intro and Pt. I

Questions for discussion: What does Matthew Towns represent to Du Bois? What is the significance of the expatriate experience? Why did Du Bois support black participation in World War I? What issues have historically arisen regarding blacks in the military? What do the successes and limitations of Pan-Africanism tell us? What's Du Bois's take on organized labor?

Nov. 13: Today's readings: *Souls*, chs. 9-11 (12 is optional); *Dark Princess*, Pt. II

Questions for discussion: What does Du Bois say about the black church? Does he regard it as emancipatory? What role(s) does the church play in African American communities today? Du Bois had a tragic experience with infant mortality, which today is higher among African Americans than among whites. What does Du Bois say about this? What do you know about Pullman porters? What function do they have in the *Dark Princess* narrative? What other groups and ideologies are discussed in Pt. II?

Book or articles review due

Nov. 20: Today's readings: *Souls*, chs. 13-14, and afterthought; *Dark Princess*, Pt. III to p. 144

Questions for discussion: What does Du Bois identify as the foundation of black musical culture? What do you think of his ideas? What is the meaning of "The Coming of John?" Does it have present-day relevance? What constitutes the heroic for Du Bois? Why Chicago? How does Du Bois evaluate black urban politics?

Nov. 27 – THANKSGIVING, no class meeting

Dec. 4: Today's readings: "My Present Program"; "Collapse of Europe"; "Talented Tenth, 1948"; "Why I Won't Vote" in the course pack; *Dark Princess*, pp. 144-214.

Questions for discussion: How did Du Bois revise his Talented Tenth thesis? What did he see as the causes and consequences of World War II? Why did he withdraw from participation in U.S. political life? What ideas about women are reflected in *Dark Princess*?

Dec. 11: Today's readings: *Dark Princess*, Pt. IV; "Postscript to 1957 Novel"; "Du Bois Joins Communist Party" in course packet

Questions for discussion: Du Bois says he has lived through nearly a century of African American history. What effect does this have on him in his old age? Why does he join the American Communist Party just as it's falling apart? Why does he join then move to Ghana? What vision of internationalism is reflected in the conclusion of *Dark Princess*?

Research paper due