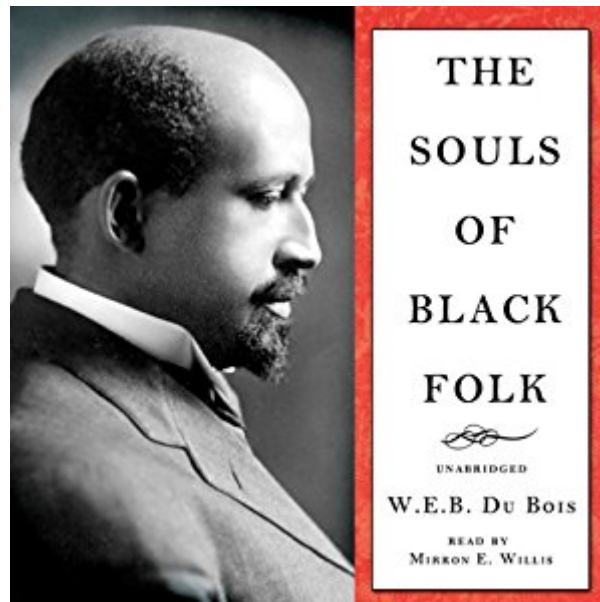


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The Souls Of Black Folk



Synopsis

"The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line," writes Du Bois, in one of the most prophetic works in all of American literature. First published in 1903, this collection of 15 essays dared to describe the racism that prevailed at that time in America-and to demand an end to it. Du Bois' writing draws on his early experiences, from teaching in the hills of Tennessee, to the death of his infant son, to his historic break with the conciliatory position of Booker T. Washington. Du Bois received a doctorate from Harvard in 1895 and became a professor of economics and history at Atlanta University. His dynamic leadership in the cause of social reform on behalf of his fellow blacks anticipated and inspired much of the black activism of the 1960s. *The Souls of Black Folk* is a classic in the literature of civil rights. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963) was one of the greatest African American intellectuals - a sociologist, historian, novelist, and activist whose astounding career spanned the nation's history from Reconstruction to the civil rights movement. Born in Massachusetts and educated at Fisk, Harvard, and the University of Berlin, his masterpiece remains his most studied and popular work. Its insights into black life at still ring true today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Souls of Black Folks, as other reviewers have pointed out, is a masterpiece of African-American thought. But it is even more than that when we consider the context and time in which the book was written. Most of what DuBois discusses is still relevant today, and this is a tribute to the man, not

only as a scholar, but as someone who was continually adapting his views in the best image and interests of black people. Some reviewers refer to DuBois as "the Black Emerson" and, as a university instructor, I heard similar references made: "the Black Dewey" or "the Black Park," referring to the Chicago School scholars. Du Bois was brilliant; indeed, these white men should be being called "the white Du Bois"! Du Bois literally created the scientific method of observation and qualitative research. With the junk being put out today in the name of "dissertations," simply re-read Du Bois' work on the Suppression of the African Slave Trade and his work on the Philadelphia Negro and it is clear that he needs not be compared to any white man of his time or any other: he was a renaissance man who cared about his people and, unlike too many of the scholars of day, he didn't just talk the talk or write the trite; he walked the walk and organized the unorganizable. White racism suffered because Du Bois raised the consciousness of the black masses. But he did more than that; by renouncing his American citizenship and moving to Ghana, he proved that Pan Africanism is not just something to preach or write about (ala Molefi Asante, Tony Martin, Jeffries and other Africanists); it is a way of life, both a means and an end.

"Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century." -W.E.B. DuBois, in the Forethought

This book contains essays written by W.E.B. DuBois. Some of them are very historical and recount the African American events and progress, and some of them are very personal, in which DuBois tells about his own life. I learned a lot from reading this book. For instance, I had always thought of what an awful thing slavery was- a horrible part of America's history- and that it was such a good thing that it was finally stopped. However, I never thought about the implications of life for the ex-slave after it was ended. Here were many African Americans, free, yes, but with what? Nothing. How would they get anywhere without money, education, jobs, etc.? And after freeing them leaders imposed unfair segregation and Jim Crow laws upon African Americans, so they were not really free at all. Another thing that interested me about this book was the evolution of the slave's religion. It is very interesting to me how DuBois discusses their original religion of magic/ancestor and earth worship, etc and their gradual progression to the Christian religion of their masters, and then back to the beginning in an almost cyclical pattern. I don't think the African-American culture would be the same at all today if it were not for this mix of religious belief, although some would argue about how good it was for a religion to be forced about them and I would tend to agree. W.E.B. DuBois was a pioneer of African American literature and thought. This book of essays will make you rethink the progress and status of African Americans throughout America's history, and will help you understand and sympathize

much more.

These essays, actually sketches and ruminations of DuBois', remain an enduring backdrop for the picture in which race in America is framed. At the end of each decade, they seem to continue emitting new pregnant meanings: During the decade of the 60s, when I first read the book, it seemed to be an open message to white America about the Negro: an appeal, as it were, that "the Negro was on the march," and that his main instrument of entering the American mainstream (his only secure dream) was his spiritual cadence and his deep and abiding faith in religion, and equally deep faith in the meaning of the American revolution, and in the American dream and its misapplied ideals. A warning was issued in the "parable of the Coming of John": a reckoning of this fractured meaning and its implied promises inevitably had to occur. When I read it during the 70s, it seemed more like an interior dialogue between "Blacks," about "being constantly on the struggle against racism." It was especially a dialogue between the "uneducated and unsophisticated" on the one hand, and "the educated and sophisticated" (the "so-called "talented tenth"), on the other. But also it was a dialogue between the conservative forces of "compromise" that wanted to win by "turning the other cheek," and the more progressive and revolutionary forces who wanted to do so "by any means necessary." Yes, Martin and Malcolm were summoned up through DuBois' words in the same debate that had occurred two generations before between DuBois and Booker T. Washington. The words, but not the structure of the arguments, had changed. They were issued with the same degree of passion, and with the same unfortunate results: more promises, but powerful little "real progress," and then the murders of both Martin and Malcolm.

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