

King's Abiding Tribute to Du Bois: Research, Activism, and the Unknowable

Presentation by Dr. Robert W. Williams,
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and the Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.,
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0.1. Abstract

[1] Martin Luther King, Jr. in his 1968 tribute, "Honoring Dr. Du Bois", praises the civil rights leader and Pan-Africanist as a champion for oppressed peoples around the world, one whose scholarship informs his pursuit of justice and peace. I wish to supplement King's cogent, retrospective summary of Du Bois's research and activism by analyzing prospective aspects of Du Bois's quest for truth that are relevant today.

[2] According to Du Bois, social research faces limits on what its methods can know-about. In particular, some areas of human behavior yield uncertain knowledge or else remain unknowable in principle. For example, he indicates that some details of history are unrecoverable, and thereby unknowable. Also, we cannot know directly another's personal experiences. The types of uncertainty and unknowability delineated by him I label as nescience. For Du Bois, nescience does not preclude activism; indeed, he responds in various activist ways. Historical unknowability prompts him to write socially conscious fiction, while unknowable individuals justify his advocacy to incorporate, via suffrage, their "excluded wisdom" into governance. **Thus, in addition to (social) science informing activism, Du Bois argues that what we do not know—our nescience—also must inform and motivate our struggles.**

[3] In the presentation I outline King's "Honoring Dr. Du Bois", emphasizing his discussion of the research/activism nexus. Then, I detail several of Du Bois's forms of nescience and their consequences for activism. Lastly, I illustrate the role of unknowability in recent examples of social activism, such as Black Lives Matter, Afrofuturism, and the Dakota Access Pipeline protests. I seek to highlight, ultimately, the relevance of Du Boisian nescience for 21st Century struggles against racial and economic inequalities.

0.2. About this Presentation [Delivered on 23 February 2018]

[1] I consider this presentation to be a *DRAFT* version, which also includes later clarifications. Herein, I explore ideas and lines of interpretation that may change in a future, more finalized form. Indeed, some aspects of the text may require further elaboration.

[2] I have implemented the presentation as a browser-based hypertext. I coded the project with javascript to provide several, hopefully useful functions. Four functions can be highlighted here. First, internal links offer numerous, non-linear ways to access the various materials composing this project. Second, a history feature allows the user to move forwards and backwards through the hypertext pages (subsections) already accessed. Third, the show /

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[3] This one-page version recreates the hypertext format as a single document. Please read the "0.3. Navigating the Presentation's One-Page Format (Help)".

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a. This page contains the full text of the hypertext-oriented presentation arranged sequentially in one window. Any information, including images, revealed via the SHOW buttons of the hypertext version are displayed herein.

b. The one-page format does not display any images located on the pages that start each hypertext section.

0.4. Online Availability of Texts

0.4.1. This presentation online:

- a. www.webdubois.org/lectures/cau2018.html
- b. One-page format: www.webdubois.org/lectures/cau2018.pdf
- c. Lectures page: www.webdubois.org/lectures/rwlectures.html

0.4.2. Martin Luther King Jr.'s text "Honoring Dr. Du Bois":

a. King, Martin Luther, Jr. 1968. "Honoring Dr. Du Bois, 1970". S.l.: s.n. Located in the W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. [Credo metadata: "Contributor(s): Freedomways Associates"]. URL: <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b287-i008> (page facsimile).

- b. In html format: <http://www.webdubois.org/works/mlk-hddb.html>.
- c. Online sources for other cited texts by King are listed in Section 7.2.

0.4.3. W.E.B. Du Bois's texts:

a. The Works Cited section (Section 7) contains many links to online sources for his primary texts cited in this presentation: Section 7.1.

b. My website also provides links to various Du Boisian primary sources. One can check the site map or visit the Sources page.

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0.5. Robert W. Williams: Bio in Brief

[1] I am a Political Science professor at Bennett College in Greensboro, NC. There I teach a range of courses in the field, including those of my academic specialization, political theory. Expanding on my graduate education in modern, contemporary, and critical theories, I also teach courses on African American political thought and on W.E.B. Du Bois. Previously, I taught at Livingstone College in Salisbury, NC.

[2] My research concentrates typically on meta-theoretical analyses that address the assumptions and implications underpinning the theories themselves. My previous studies have focused on environmental justice, the spatiality of politics, and cyber-politics. I focus my

current efforts on the philosophical dimensions of W.E.B. Du Bois's thought, especially as they relate to his philosophy of social inquiry. Such efforts also involve studying the intellectual context of his era. In addition, I conduct digital humanities research on Du Bois (projects page).

[3] My *curriculum vitae* (online) contains more information on my research and teaching experiences. Also listed on the C.V. are my other conference presentations on Du Bois (lectures page).

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[5] My personal academic websites:

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- www.nightspace.org

[6] At academia.edu: <https://bennett.academia.edu/RobertWilliams>

0.6. Acknowledgments and Copyrights

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[1] I wish to thank the many and various persons who have assisted me and made this presentation possible. Arranged alphabetically, the list includes:

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0.7. Sub/Sections (Map)

One-Page Top

- 0.1. Abstract
- 0.2. About This Presentation
- 0.3. Navigating the Presentation (Help Page)
- 0.4. Online Availability of Texts
- 0.5. Robert W. Williams: Bio in Brief
- 0.6. Acknowledgments and Copyrights
- 0.7. Sub/Sections (Map)

1.0. Introduction

- 1.1. The Abiding Themes of "Honoring Dr. Du Bois"
- 1.2. Specific Goals of the Presentation

2.0. "Honoring Dr. Du Bois"

- 2.1. The Occasion
- 2.2. The Tribute
- 2.3. Du Bois's Research/Activism Nexus

3.0. Du Boisian Nescience

- 3.1. Types of Nescience
- 3.2. Historical Unknowability
- 3.3. Human Unknowability

4.0. Religion and Nescience

- 4.1. "Divine Dissatisfaction"
- 4.2. Du Bois and Religion
- 4.3. Religion as Nescience
- 4.4. Du Bois and King on Religion

5.0. 21st Century Relevance

- 5.1. Nescience Nowadays
- 5.2. Recent Examples

6.0. In Closing (and Appendices)

- 6.1. Knowledge and Nescience
- 6.2. Appendix 1: Sources on the Du Bois Centennial
- 6.3. Appendix 2: Du Bois on Art

7.0. Works Cited

- 7.1. Works by W.E.B. Du Bois
- 7.2. Works by Martin Luther King, Jr.
- 7.3. Works by Others

8.0. Suggested Resources

- 8.1. Texts
- 8.2. Websites and Blogs
- 8.3. Videos and Podcasts

One-Page Bottom

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SECTION 1: Introduction

1.1. The Abiding Themes of "Honoring Dr. Du Bois"

[Section 1.1. Summary.]

- M.L. King's tribute abides because it is a retrospective on W.E.B. Du Bois's research and activism for justice (Du Bois's research/activism nexus).
- King's tribute does not cover Du Bois's views on the limitations of research and the lack of knowledge of some things (i.e., nescience).
- For Du Bois: **what we do not know also must inform and motivate our activism.**
- Ingress into the idea of Du Boisian nescience is found in King's use of "divine dissatisfaction" within the tribute.
- King's tribute also abides because it offers a prospective way to illustrate Du Bois's relevance today.

[1] In his 1968 tribute "Honoring Dr. Du Bois" Martin Luther King, Jr. praises the civil rights leader and Pan-Africanist as a champion for oppressed peoples around the world, one whose scholarship informs his pursuit of justice and peace (HDDDB 1970). King offers us both a retrospective on Du Bois and also a prospective on his relevance to 21st Century social issues. In that sense, his tribute of 50 years ago abides because it highlights how Du Bois's engaged scholarship speaks to us now. King, in his words, emphasizes Du Bois's research in conjunction with organizing. In my words, I say that King concentrates his speech on Du Bois's research/activism nexus. Research and the knowledge gained thereby will in some way inform the activism oriented to social justice.

[2] What King does not set forth in "Honoring" is another aspect of Du Bois's research/activism nexus: namely, that the limitations on scholarly research, which Du Bois himself outlines, entail limitations on the knowledge gained. Such limitations on knowledge involve uncertainty and unknowability, which together I call Du Bois's implicit idea of nescience. As a consequence, for Du Bois, activists who can utilize knowledge in planning and policies must be aware of how the lack of knowledge also can influence actions, especially in terms of what we can know of the past and how values and ideals can guide our actions in the present. Hence, in addition to social research informing activism, Du Bois argues that **what we do not know—our nescience—also must inform and motivate our struggles.**

[3] Although King does not study Du Boisian nescience, there is a point of ingress within the tribute by which to discuss it: namely, by way of King's characterization of Du Bois as possessing "divine dissatisfaction" about oppression in the world. This term—the first of only two explicitly religious references in King's tribute—points us to one of the types of Du

Boisian nescience: the uncertainty of values and ideals, including religious ones, because their normative content cannot be scientifically grounded as objectively real. Here, then, is another abiding dimension of King's tribute. "Honoring Dr. Du Bois" continues to prompt us to new insights: we can examine parallels between King and Du Bois, parallels which on first reading the tribute may not seem obvious. Also, such insights help us to understand Du Bois's relevance in the the 21st Century.

Section 1.2. Specific Goals of the Presentation

[Section 1.2. Summary.]

- **Section 2:** The occasion of the tribute; the tribute summarized; its main tenets listed.
- **Section 3:** Du Boisian nescience includes historical unknowability; the lack of direct knowledge of others; the unknowability of ultimate reality; and the normative uncertainty of values and ideals.
- **Section 4:** Normative uncertainty is discussed in terms of the relationship between science and religion, as expressed by Du Bois and by King.
- **Section 5:** Du Boisian nescience can be applied to Afrofuturism, the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the Moral Mondays protests.

[4] Ultimately, I wish to substantiate the claim that for Du Bois our lack of knowledge has important consequences for the activism that we undertake. In this presentation I will sketch, as part of Section 2, the occasion at which King delivers his speech and then summarize King's tribute with special emphasis on the relationship between research and activism. I briefly note Du Bois's research/activism nexus which supports an interpretation of the role of knowledge in activism.

[5] Yet the continuing pursuit of knowledge by Du Bois does not preclude him from recognizing the lack of knowledge, or nescience. In Section 3, I examine uncertainty and unknowability, outlining in particular:

- historical unknowability; and
- the lack of direct knowledge of others.

This section also covers the corresponding forms of activism suggested by Du Bois.

[6] Section 4 discusses two other types of Du Boisian nescience:

- the unknowability of ultimate reality and cosmic meaning; and
- the normative uncertainty that emerges at the heart of values and ideals—norms that characterize belief systems including religion faiths, but whose content and worth can neither be confirmed nor denied by scientific evidence.

Normative uncertainty sets up an analysis of Du Bois on the relationship between science and religion, both of which are required as part of the activism needed to promote social justice. In such an interconnection Du Bois parallels King. I will note the similarities as well as differences in their views on science vis-à-vis religion.

[7] In Section 5 I apply Du Boisian nescience as described in this presentation to several recent examples of the ongoing struggles against injustice: the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, the Black Lives Matter movement, the Moral Mondays protests, and Afrofuturism.

[8] A Note on the Citation System Used in the Presentation

- Du Bois is referenced within the presentation by an abbreviated title and year of publication. Section 7.1. lists the full references.
- King likewise is referenced by an abbreviated title and year of publication. Also note that herein, King's "Honoring Dr. Du Bois"—HDDB—refers to the 1970 pamphlet. Section 7.2. contains the full references.

SECTION 2: "Honoring Dr. Du Bois"

2.1. The Occasion

[Section 2.1. Summary.]

- *Freedomways* organized a commemoration to honor Du Bois on 23 February 1968, the 100th anniversary of his birth.
- At this "International Cultural Evening" numerous well known luminaries participated.
- Martin Luther King delivered the Centennial Address: "Honoring Dr. Du Bois".

[9] In 1968, a few years after the passing of W.E.B. Du Bois, the periodical *Freedomways* organized a commemoration to honor the civil rights activist and scholar. *Freedomways* was a leftist, indeed Communist, publication which Du Bois and his second wife, Shirley Graham, had helped to found and for which they had frequently written. The periodical sought to inform and organize African Americans in the political and cultural struggles against racial and economic oppression in the U.S.A., Africa, and the rest of the world.

[10] Called an "International Cultural Evening", the event convened on 23 February in Carnegie Hall, New York City, on the centennial of Du Bois's birth. The occasion also inaugurated an "International Year" that *Freedomways* intended as a commemoration of his life and achievements (Freedomways Associates 1968). Numerous well known activists attended the "International Cultural Evening" with the Hall filled or nearly filled to capacity (Davidow 1968; FBI File on James Baldwin). Ossie Davis was the Master of Ceremonies, while Pete Singer and Len Chandler, as well as Lorenz Graham sang, Eleanor McCoy danced, and Cynthia Belgrave read two poems by Du Bois. James Baldwin and Edmund W. Gordon presented their tributes to Du Bois. His wife Shirley Graham sent a cable which was read to the audience.

[11] Dr. Martin Luther King presented after the others and delivered what was billed as the Centennial Address (Freedomways Associates 1968). *Freedomways* published King's full address in a 1968 issue. A separate pamphlet was printed by Freedomways Associates in 1970.

[12] Appendix 1, which is Section 6.2. ("Sources on the Du Bois Centennial"), outlines various secondary sources that describe the Du Bois commemoration at which King spoke. Such sources include the declassified FBI surveillance files of King, James Baldwin, and Stanley Levison.

2.2. The Tribute

[Section 2.2. Summary.]

- For King: Du Bois's research and activism focus on refuting the myths of racial inferiority.
- King argues: Du Bois, of necessity, intertwines research and organizing.
- The tribute's major tenets (using my terms): Du Bois is an **engaged scholar**, whose **embodiment** in Black communities informs his research and activism for justice; Du Bois's search for truth details **Africana agency** in history, which **benefits Whites** also because it corrects historical distortions.

2.2.1. Summary of the Tribute

[13] Although "Honoring Dr. Du Bois" is a tribute, it would provide a solid basis for an extended treatise on Du Bois's research and its connection to activism. In the majority of the speech King discusses how Du Bois melded research and activism, or organizing as King calls it, both in the U.S.A. and internationally.

[14] King in the tribute examines the focus of Du Bois's research and activism, saying:

"Dr. Du Bois recognized that the keystone in the arch of [racial] oppression was the myth of inferiority and he dedicated his brilliant talents to demolish it." [HDDDB 1970: ¶ 4=pp.1-2]

King sketches several of the important works of sociological and historical research produced by Du Bois over his life that challenged the myths and lies of racial inferiority. He includes *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade*, *The Philadelphia Negro*, the *Atlanta University Studies*. He emphasizes the importance of Du Bois's magnum opus *Black Reconstruction*. The book conveys how African Americans during the post-Civil War years were able build the infrastructure for racial uplift—actions which not only illuminate Black agency, but also undercut White supremacist ideology.

[15] In the tribute King emphasizes that Du Bois the scholar becomes Du Bois the organizer—an activist institutionalizing and mobilizing protest. King speaks:

"He soon realized that studies would never adequately be pursued nor changes realized without the mass involvement of Negroes. The scholar then became an organizer and with others founded the NAACP. At the same time he became aware that the expansion of imperialism was a threat to the emergence of Africa." [HDDDB 1970: ¶ 12=pp.3-4]

In another passage of the speech that reinforces the connection of researcher and activist, King says:

"Above all he did not content himself with hurling invectives for emotional release and then to retire into smug, passive satisfaction. History had taught him it is not enough for people to be angry—the supreme task is to organize and unite people so that their anger becomes a transforming force. It was never possible to know where the scholar Du Bois ended and the organizer Du Bois began. The two qualities in him were a single, unified force." [HDDDB 1970: ¶ 26=pp.8-9]

[16] Overall, "Honoring Dr. Du Bois" have led others to argue that it conveys King's more radically socialist views on racial and social justice (Halpern 2015; West 2015). The tribute joins, for example, King's "Beyond Vietnam" (BV 1967), "The Three Evils of Society" (TEOS 1967); and "Where Do We Go From Here" (WDWG 1967)—speeches that set forth structural-type critiques of social problems and the need, as he proclaims in "Beyond

Vietnam", for a "radical revolution of values" (BV 1967).

2.2.2. Major Tenets of the Tribute

[17] King delineates several important tenets about Du Bois that resonate with our application of research to social justice issues today.

- a) Du Bois is an engaged scholar, as we might call him today, for whom organizing and scholarly studies are necessary and intertwined.
- b) Du Bois sought the truth in order to challenge the lies and myths about African Americans. This truth involves what we could call human agency, or as King frames it in a discussion of *Black Reconstruction* the Black "capacity to govern" (HDDDB 1970: ¶ 19=p.6).
- c) Du Bois was **of** the Black community, not merely an observer of them. We might say today that his embodiment both motivated his drive for justice and also his insights into the possible way to achieve it. King says:

"Whatever else he was, with his multitude of careers and professional titles, he was first and always a black man. He used his richness of talent as a trust for his people. He saw that Negroes were robbed of so many things decisive to their existence that the theft of their history seemed only a small part of their losses. But Dr. Du Bois knew that to lose one's history is to lose one's self-understanding and with it the roots for pride. This drove him to become a historian of Negro life, and the combination of his unique zeal and intellect rescued for all of us a heritage whose loss would have profoundly impoverished us." [HDDDB 1970: ¶ 22=pp.7-8]

- d) Whites benefit when they know the truth about African Americans in U.S. history. King says:

"In closing, it would be well to remind white America of its debt to Dr. Du Bois. When they corrupted Negro history they distorted American history, because Negroes are too big a part of the building of this nation to be written out of it without destroying scientific history. White America, drenched with lies about Negroes, has lived too long in a fog of ignorance. Dr. Du Bois gave them a gift of truth for which they should eternally be indebted to him." [HDDDB 1970: ¶ 29=pp.9-10]

Accordingly, not to know the truth is damaging to a correct understanding of history, which many Whites claim to espouse.

2.3. Du Bois's Research/Activism Nexus

[Section 2.3. Summary.]

- Du Bois's research/activism nexus: gather knowledge that can guide activism.
- Du Bois seeks knowledge via social research across his life. He never repudiates social research.
- However, Du Bois indicates that we also lack knowledge-about some phenomena because they are unknowable in principle (i.e., **Du Boisian nescience**).

2.3.1. Knowledge and Action

[18] King in "Honoring" rightly stresses the interaction between Du Bois's research and his activism. Du Bois maintained a life-long pursuit of knowledge to challenge the myths and lies about which King speaks (Alexander 2015; D.L. Lewis 1993 and 2000; Morris 2015; Wright 2016). Du Bois's activism in earlier years focused on distributing the information he gathered in professional and popular presses, speaking in numerous private, public, and

government venues, all as a public intellectual (in our current terminology). He notes that the type of research he pursues varies by the activism in which he engages, such as when his duties as *Crisis* editor supercede most of the field research he previously has conducted (MEPF 1944: ¶ 70). A notable exception is his trip to France in the aftermath of the First World War to survey the treatment of African American troops. His activism continues as a public intellectual, writing and speaking on the social issues of the day. Increasingly, such activities include organizing efforts: marches, boycotts, Pan-African conferences, and his pageants of African American history and uplift.

[19] Upon leaving *The Crisis* editorship due to ideological differences he returned to his "ivory tower," as he describes it to Moses Asch in an interview (RAMA 1961: Side 2, Band 3). He works on *Black Reconstruction* and seeks, ultimately unsuccessfully in the 1940s to get the Black Land Grant colleges to do research on African Americans (AUP-21 1941; AUP-22 1943; AUP-23 1944). His activities as a public intellectual widen to include his efforts for organizations promoting world peace, his (unsuccessful) campaign for government office, and further work for the Pan-African movement (AATW 1946; TPAM 1947; see also Mullen 2016; Sinitiere 2013). The last major research project, unfinished at his death in 1963, is his long-sought *Encyclopedia Africana*.

2.3.2. Our Lack of Knowledge

[20] Yet in the midst of his ongoing quest for knowledge, Du Bois also indicates in numerous places that some things cannot be known at all or cannot known with any certainty. We must act in the world, he argues, regardless of whether knowledge might be gained or not (MEPF 1944: ¶ 72). The relationship of nescience to knowledge is the topic of the next section.

[Note 1—Limitations on Research.]

In "My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom" Du Bois provides vital details of his views on the limitations of social research (MEPF 1944: ¶¶ 68-75, ¶¶ 122-128).

For an examination of Du Bois's views of the limitations of research vis-à-vis activism and how that understanding conjoined with social events prompt his pursuit of *The Crisis* editorship, read Williams 2014a and 2014b, or access my 2016 talk, "W.E.B. Du Bois on Scientific Knowledge and Its Limits" (especially Section 2), or my 2017 talk, "W.E.B. Du Bois at the Horizon of History and Sociology."

[End of Note 1.]

SECTION 3: Du Boisian Nescience

3.1. Types of Nescience

[Section 3.1. Summary.]

- Unknowability (nescience): evidence is lacking and may never be available. Yet we must act in the world despite lacking scientific knowledge.
- King in his tribute does not discuss Du Bois's views on nescience.
- This section covers historical unknowability and the unknowability of others (i.e., no direct knowledge).

[21] Across his life and texts, published and unpublished, essays, books, and correspondence, Du Bois indicates the limitations on what we can know via our research methods.

- a) The evidence can be incomplete.
- b) The evidence may not be available—yet.
- c) The evidence may not be recoverable by any extant or future methods.

d) The evidence available may not be able to confirm or disconfirm the existence of some thing (e.g., a higher power or deity).

I have conducted work on Du Boisian nescience in terms of what I call his un/knownable framework: access my 2016 talk, "W.E.B. Du Bois on Scientific Knowledge and Its Limits" (Sections 3–8).

[22] For this presentation I will focus on four general areas where Du Bois indicates that knowledge is uncertain or is not knowable in principle:

- a) history;
- b) knowledge experienced directly by each of us, as Du Bois frames it;
- c) ultimate reality and cosmic meaning; and
- d) norms and values, including religion values and faith.

History, direct knowledge, and ultimate reality I have categorized as types of unknowability for Du Bois. Ideals and values for Du Bois I have called normative uncertainty because the data available can neither confirm nor disconfirm their worth or their specific content. Each type of nescience has its associated type of activism that Du Bois conducts.

[23] King does not discuss Du Bois's views on nescience when, in the tribute, he covers how Du Bois's research seeks knowledge to be used in activism. Yet what we cannot know at all or know only with uncertainty has consequences for the struggles against injustice. In this section I discuss historical unknowability and the fundamental (or direct) unknowability of others. I will discuss the unknowability of ultimate reality and the uncertainty of values and ideals in Section 4.3.

3.2. Historical Unknowability

[Section 3.2. Summary.]

- Du Bois uses history to refute lies and misrepresentations.
- Yet historical research is limited: evidence can be unavailable or unrecoverable.
- Historical unknowability prompts Du Bois to artistic endeavors: e.g., historical fiction.

3.2.1. The Unrecoverable Past

[24] History for Du Bois the scholar is important for the lessons to be learned and from the precedents that have occurred. Studying history can allow us to grasp how in the long-run the "cost of liberty is less than the price of repression", as he framed it (EORP 1909: ¶ 13; also JB 1909: p.395). Similarly, in a less quoted passage from *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade* Du Bois writes in the book's last paragraph: "From this we may conclude that it behooves nations as well as men to do things at the very moment when they ought to be done." (SAST 1896: Sec. 96)

[25] Yet despite the importance of studying history Du Bois indicates that our historical research is limited because much evidence is not available or else is unrecoverable.

"When in this world we seek the truth about what men have thought and felt and done, we face insuperable difficulties. We seldom can see enough of human action at first hand to interpret it properly. We can never know current personal thought and emotion with sufficient understanding rightly to weigh its cause and effect. After action and feeling and reflection are long past, then from writing and memory we may secure some picture of the total truth, but it will be sorely imperfect, with much omitted, much forgotten, much distorted." [PSOM 1957: ¶ 3]

This historical unknowability, as I call Du Bois's views, must be addressed. It should not stop us, but rather it should prompt us to use, in his words, the "imagination where documented material and personal experience are lacking." (PSOM 1957: ¶ 4)

3.2.2. Art as Activism

[26] Historical unknowability prompts Du Bois to artistic endeavors. Art in the form of historical fiction is a type of activism for which he establishes several guidelines.

"I have personally lived through much of the history of the American Negro from 1876 to 1956. Yet wide as my experience has been, by travel, seeing, hearing and knowing, I of course actually knew but an infinitesimal fraction of all that happened. The gaps of knowledge I can in part supply by the memory of others, by reading published and unpublished matter. Yet with all this I am far from being able to set down an accurate historical account of those fatal eighty years.

"Therefore I have assayed first to gather such verifiable facts as I can. This body of knowledge I have compared with the reports of others. But even with all this, much, indeed most, is missing: just what men thought, the actual words they used, the feelings and motives which impelled them — those I do not know and most of them none will ever know. These facts are gone forever. But it is possible for the creative artist to imagine something of such unknown truth. If he is lucky or inspired, he may write a story which may set down a fair version of the truth of an era, or a group of facts about human history." [PSOM 1957: ¶¶ 6-7]

Du Bois's view on the artistic imagination in the "Postscript" calls our attention to his more recognized idea expressed three decades earlier in "Criteria of Negro Art" (CNA 1926). There he writes that the role of the artist is to depict African Americans as loving and enjoying life just like everyone else—a role he describes as positive propaganda. Indeed, "all Art is propaganda", he asserts (CNA 1926: ¶ 29, ¶ 2). (In Appendix 2—which is Section 6.3. below—I discuss the difference between the "Criteria of Negro Art" and the "Postscript").

[27] In addition to numerous shorter fictional works, Du Bois writes a few books of historical fiction, where the guidelines mentioned above tend to adhere. We can turn to *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (QSF 1911), *Dark Princess* (DRKP 1928), and the Black Flame trilogy that includes *The Ordeal of Mansart*, *Mansart Builds a School*, and *Worlds of Color* (BFOM 1957, BFMB 1959, and BFWC 1961).

[Note 2—Du Bois's Shorter Works of Fiction.]

Du Bois writes short works of fiction across his lifetime. While an undergraduate at Fisk University he publishes "Tom Brown at Fisk" in the *Fisk Herald*, for which he serves as the editor-in-chief (TBF1, TBF2, TBF3, 1887-1888). He also publishes fictional pieces in other periodicals that he edits: *The Moon Illustrated Weekly* and *The Horizon*. He includes one fictional chapter in *The Souls of Black Folk* (SBF 1903), and intersperses many fictional pieces in *Darkwater* (DARK 1920). A collection of these shorter works exists: see the Aptheker edited volume, *Creative Writings by W.E.B. Du Bois: A Pageant, Poems, Short Stories and Playlets* (WCWP 1985).

[End of Note 2.]

3.3. Human Unknowability

[Section 3.3. Summary.]

- For Du Bois: we **can know-about** others, but we **cannot know directly** another's experiences and knowledge.
- Our lack of direct knowledge has consequences: the "excluded wisdom" of others is not available for us to experience.
- Politicians and bureaucrats need the "excluded wisdom" to govern.
- Thus, the political inclusion of marginalized persons is a central goal of activism.

3.3.1. Unknowable Others

[28] Via research broadly defined we **can know-about** persons and things in the world, but we **cannot know directly** another's experiences and knowledge. Specifically, for Du Bois we have no direct knowledge of the joys, sufferings, and experiences of others. In "The Individual and Social Conscience" (IASC 1905), he writes:

"Here in this my neighbor stand things I do not know, experiences I have never felt, depths whose darkness is beyond me, and heights hidden by the clouds; or, perhaps, rather, differences in ways of thinking, and dreaming, and feeling which I guess at rather than know; strange twistings of soul that curve between the grotesque and the awful." [IASC 1905: ¶ 3]

Hence, when we talk of knowledge of other individuals, groups, and cultures we are actually talking in terms of knowledge about the others. Our scientific methods only allow us to know-about them. Other individuals remain unknowable to, or by means of, our direct experience.

3.3.2. "Excluded Wisdom"

[29] Du Bois indicates that certain political consequences follow from our inability to directly and experientially know another's thoughts or feelings. In "Of the Ruling of Men", which is Chapter VI in *Darkwater*, Du Bois writes:

[. . .] "But remember the foundation of the argument [in support of democracy], — that in the last analysis only the sufferer knows his sufferings and that no state can be strong which excludes from its expressed wisdom the knowledge possessed by mothers, wives, and daughters. We have but to view the unsatisfactory relations of the sexes the world over and the problem of children to realize how desperately we need this excluded wisdom.

The same arguments apply to other excluded groups: if a race, like the Negro race, is excluded, then so far as that race is a part of the economic and social organization of the land, the feeling and the experience of that race are absolutely necessary to the realization of the broadest justice for all citizens. [. . .]" [OROM 1920: ¶¶ 27-28]

Du Bois's term "excluded wisdom" with regard to democracy is much studied by later scholars, such as Balfour 2011; Bromell 2011 & 2013; Gooding-Williams 2009; Lunt 2011; McBride 2004; and Monteiro 2008.

3.3.3. Activism for Political Inclusion

[30] "Excluded wisdom" becomes the basis for Du Bois to link the fundamental unknowability of others' knowledge and experiences to governmental policymaking via the support and enforcement of the electoral franchise. Du Bois devotes much effort to expanding suffrage to women and for securing suffrage for all men, such as was constitutionally stated in the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

[31] The "excluded wisdom" of the disfranchised and marginalized citizens is also the basis to expand the democratic control over industrial and commercial activities that early 20th Century socialists, and Du Bois as a socialist, consider harmful to the citizens. In language resembling the idea of worker control over the means of production, he writes in "Ruling":

"The knowledge of what to do in industry and how to do it in order to attain the resulting goods rests in the hands and brains of the workers and managers, and the judges of the result are the public. Consequently it is not so much a question as to whether the world will admit democratic control here as how can such control be long avoided when the people once understand the fundamentals of industry. How can civilization persist in letting one person or a group of persons, by secret inherent power, determine what goods shall be made — whether bread or champagne, overcoats or silk socks? Can so vast a power be kept from the people?" [OROM 1920: ¶ 42]

Du Bois in "Of the Ruling of Men" argues that government actions must be justified by both science and citizen participation. However, I must note that he does not specify how any conflicts between the democratic input of citizens and the scientific findings of researchers might be reconciled.

SECTION 4: Religion and Nescience

4.1. "Divine Dissatisfaction"

[Section 4.1. Summary.]

- In the 1968 tribute King makes his first religious references in the last paragraph.
- For King, Du Bois's "greatest virtue" includes his "divine dissatisfaction with all forms of injustice."
- Du Boisian nescience can be discussed in relation to "divine dissatisfaction".

4.1.1. Du Bois's "Greatest Virtue"

[32] It is in the last paragraph of "Honoring Dr. Du Bois" that we return to King within the context of Du Boisian nescience. He says:

"In conclusion let me say that Dr. Du Bois' greatest virtue was his committed empathy with all the oppressed and his divine dissatisfaction with all forms of injustice." [HDDDB 1970: ¶ 34=p.11]

Here, King explicitly references religion, which he has not done throughout the tribute.

[33] King links the religious allusion to a list of concerns that must be addressed in order to overcome social problems, not only in the U.S.A. but also in the world. The list is long.

"Today we are still challenged to be dissatisfied. Let us be dissatisfied until every man can have food and material necessities for his body, culture and education for his mind, freedom and human dignity for his spirit. Let us be dissatisfied until rat-infested, vermin-filled slums will be a thing of a dark past and every family will have a decent, sanitary house in which to live. Let us be dissatisfied until the empty stomachs of Mississippi are filled and the idle industries of Appalachia are revitalized. Let us be dissatisfied until brotherhood is no longer a meaningless word at the end of a prayer but the first order of business on every legislative agenda. Let us be dissatisfied until our brother of the Third World—Asia, Africa,

and Latin America—will no longer be the victim of imperialist exploitation, but will be lifted from the long night of poverty, illiteracy, and disease. Let us be dissatisfied until this pending cosmic elegy will be transformed into a creative psalm of peace and 'justice will roll down like waters from a mighty stream.'" [HDDDB 1970: ¶ 34=p.11]

Du Bois would probably agree that the listed problems must also be addressed and steps must be taken to overcome or ameliorate them.

[Note 3—Du Bois on "Divine Discontent".]

As Jonathon Kahn observes, Du Bois has used the phrase "divine discontent": "...Du Bois's divine discontent bears resemblance to what—more than a half century later—Martin Luther King, Jr. called 'divine dissatisfaction'" (Kahn 2009: p.139, n.26; also p.9)

Kahn is referring to the 1898 commencement address at Fisk University in which Du Bois says:

"It is now ten years since I stood amid these walls on my commencement morning, ten years full of toil and happiness and sorrow, and the full delight of hard work. And as I look back on that youthful gleam, and see the vision splendid, the trailing clouds of glory that lighted then the wide way of life, I am ever glad that I stepped into the world guided of strong faith in its promises, and inspired by no sordid aims. And from that world I come back to welcome you, my brothers and sisters. **I cannot promise you happiness always, but I can promise you divine discontent with the imperfect.** I cannot promise you success—'tis not in mortals to command success.

"But as you step into life I can give you three watchwords: First, you are Negroes, members of that dark, historic race that from the world's dawn has slept to hear the trumpet summons sound through our ears. Cherish unwavering faith in the blood of your fathers, and make sure this last triumph of humanity. Remember next, that you are gentlemen and ladies, trained in the liberal arts and subjects in that vast kingdom of culture that has lighted the world from [p.14 starts] its infancy and guided it through bigotry and falsehood and sin. As such, let us see in you an unfaltering honesty wedded to that finer courtesy and breeding which is the heritage of the well trained and the well born. And, finally, remember that you are the sons of Fisk University, that venerable mother who rose out of the blood and dust of battle to work the triumphs of the Prince of Peace. The mighty blessing of all her sons and daughters encompass you, and the sad sacrifice of every pure soul, living and dead, that has made her what she is, bend its dark wings about you and make you brave and good!" [CCBN 1898: pp.13-14; Bold face added for emphasis.]

[End of Note 3.]

[34] Also note that the second explicit reference to religion within the entire tribute occurs in this last paragraph: "justice will roll down like waters from a mighty stream." The phrase derives from the Bible, specifically Amos 5:24, English Standard Version, which states: "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." That Biblical phrase also incorporates a portion of the passage from the King James Version, where we read: "But let judgment run down as water, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

4.1.2. King's "Where Do We Go From Here"

[35] King has used the term "divine dissatisfaction" before, notably in his speech at the Eleventh Annual Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference which was held in Atlanta on 16 August 1967. Entitled "Where Do We Go From Here", its list parallels

the list in King's tribute to Du Bois especially with the former's focus on ending oppression and poverty in America. However, King in 1967 concentrates on the U.S.A. with general references to a universal humanity of all races (King WDWG). In "Honoring Dr. Du Bois", however, King adds a specific reference to peoples around the world suffering from "imperialist exploitation" (HDDDB 1970: ¶ 34=p.11).

[36] In the tribute's last paragraph King both raises the prospective aspect of applying Du Bois to the problems listed—in effect, applying Du Bois's research/activism nexus to the problems—and also invites us to more closely examine how religion fits into Du Boisian nescience.

4.2. Du Bois and Religion

[Section 4.2. Summary.]

- Du Bois uses religious themes, motifs, and imagery throughout his life.
- Scholars have long studied such themes and Du Bois's own religiosity.
- Such scholarship does not examine Du Bois's religious themes in relation to his idea of nescience.

4.2.1. Du Bois's Religious Themes

[37] Du Bois's use of religion themes and motifs is well recognized.

- a) In shorter fictional works, such as short stories, parables, poetry, and prayers.
- b) In longer fictional works, especially novels, including *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (QSF 1911) and *Dark Princess* (DRKP 1928).
- c) In the personal testament of "Credo" (CRDI 1904) and in an exhortation to social duty, "The Individual and Social Conscience" (IASC 1905).
- d) In non-fictional books, including *The Souls of Black Folk* (SBF 1903) and *The Gift of Black Folk* (GBF 1924).
- e) Du Bois has published on religion in Black communities in an Atlanta University study, *The Negro Church* (AUP-8), and in "Religion in the South" (RITS 1907), where he argues that Black churches are important in the everyday life of African Americans and are integral to the struggle for racial uplift.
- f) He links religious themes to more materialist analyses of industrial capitalism and imperialist exploitation: for example, "The Revelation of St. Orgne the Damned" (RSOD 1939) and "Jason and Esau" (JAE 1944).

Du Bois's vast corpus provides many other examples.

4.2.2. Scholars on Du Bois and Religion

[38] Later scholars have long studied not only Du Bois's works pertaining to religion and religious themes, but also debated his own personal religiosity. What were his religious beliefs? Was he agnostic? Was he atheistic at some point in his life? How did he influence religious movements, such as the Social Gospel movement, during his life? How did he utilize religious themes and ideas in his works and activism. Such scholars include Blum 2007, Dorrien 2015, B. Johnson 2008, Kahn 2009, Sinitiere 2012, and Zuckerman 2000.

[39] Although informative, the scholars do not thematize Du Bois's views on religion in terms of his thoughts on uncertainty and unknowability.

4.3. Religion as Nescience

[Section 4.3. Summary.]

- Du Boisian nescience implicates religion in terms of the unknowability of ultimate reality, and the normative uncertainty of values and ideals.
- Ultimate reality and cosmic meaning are fundamentally unknowable because they cannot be operationalized per se as part of empirical studies.
- Normative uncertainty (my term): we cannot empirically confirm or disconfirm the content and worth of values and ideals with the evidence available.
- For Du Bois: science can know what to do, but not why.
- Du Bois argues: organized religions are still needed to provide ideals, compassion, and motivation.

4.3.1. Religious Forms of Nescience

[40] I am not studying Du Bois's personal religious beliefs or any corresponding religious tenets. Rather, I seek to examine how his views on religion in general relate to his idea of nescience and the associated necessity for acting in the world. As I delineated elsewhere in a typology of knowledge and nescience (Williams 2016 talk), religion fits into Du Boisian nescience in two ways:

- the unknowability of ultimate reality, and
- the normative uncertainty of discerning the content and worth of values and ideals.

[41] For Du Bois, scientific knowledge is vital to life and must be gathered. Yet the sciences cannot know about ultimate reality. It is impossible to operationalize cosmic meaning or a supreme deity, which are considered by religious belief systems to be supernatural and thereby not able to be operationalized and studied via empirical methods. Du Bois alludes to this in a brief note that he sends in response to a question about his personal beliefs on immortality. He replies:

"My thought on personal immortality is easily explained. I do not know. I do not see how any one could know. Our whole basis of knowledge is so relative and contingent that when we get to argue concerning ultimate reality and the real essence of life and the past and the future, we seem to be talking without real data and getting nowhere. I have every respect for people who believe in the future life, but I cannot accept their belief or their wish as knowledge. Equally, I am not impressed by those who deny the possibility of future life. I have no knowledge of the possibilities of this universe and I know of no one who has." [IMMT 1935]

The ultimate purpose of the universe is not knowable—indeed, it is fundamentally unknowable to science. Nonetheless, Du Bois does not consider that such unknowability is meaningless or without some good in it.

[42] In a similar manner, science can offer no certainty for the normative values that we humans can name as dear to us, but which we cannot confirm or disconfirm with evidence. "The Church and Religion", a 1933 essay in *The Crisis* provides a succinct summary of what I have called his view on normative uncertainty.

[. . .] "Life is largely and must be a series of assumptions. In so far as these assumptions are confirmed by the recurrent happenings of the world, we have a right to assume that they are approximately true. But we must even go beyond this. There is, for instance, faith in the triumph of good deeds; hope that the world will grow better; love of our relatives and our neighbors and of all humanity.

"It would be difficult to adduce scientific proof that these hopes and faiths are justified, and still there is good reason for our assuming that they are and guiding our conduct accordingly." [TCAR 1933: ¶¶ 2-3]

Indeed, at any point in time indicators of, for example, both social progress and social regress are observable. Which is more prevalent over the long run of history? Any answer would be debatable in a way that the existence of gravity is not.

[Note 4—Normative Uncertainty Illustrated.]

What do we specify, for example, when we talk about the value of equality?

- What type of equality? Equality of opportunity? Equality of result? (Perhaps equity also should be examined?)
- Equality applied to which aspects of life? Equal access to the same educational environments or to needed health care?
- Is equality something good? Why or why not? When and when not?

We can operationalize the variables in an empirical study of equality (the definitions of which would be contested), but we will not reach a conclusion satisfactory to all—hence, my use of the term normative uncertainty. Alternately, gravity (analyzable with physics) is experienced by all on the planet and is presumably not contested by anyone.

[End of Note 4.]

[43] Despite the difficulties of empirically discerning the content and worth of values and ideals, Du Bois argues that there is still hope. We cannot know-about, via evidence, whether good or evil will triumph in the world, or whether justice will triumph, but we have reasons to act "as if" such positive values and ideals will come to pass. Although Du Bois does not specify the good reasons that he mentions in the essay, he reinforces our need to act in the world because we are of the world.

[44] I should note that the essay "The Church and Religion" distinguishes between religion as beliefs about the world and our roles and purposes in it, on the one hand, and organized religion (or the church, as he sometimes writes) as the actual practices by humans implementing religious beliefs, on the other. He tends to accept the positive role of religious beliefs (within the bounds of reason and fact) and castigates organized religion's practices—a point to which he often returns (as we will read below).

4.3.2. Science vis-à-vis Religion

[45] For a more extended treatment of science and religion we can read Du Bois's 1945 book, *Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace* (CDCP 1945). For him, science is vital in the decolonization process and in the building of post-colonial societies. He claims that science can know what to do, but not why we should do so. Hence, science faces limitations because it cannot ethically justify actions in the world. In the book Du Bois criticizes organized religions for supporting oppression and exploitation across time, yet they still occupy a vital role. He writes:

"Notwithstanding this [critique of organized religion], it is all too clear today that if we are to have a sufficient motive for the uplift of backward peoples, for the redemption and progress of colonials, such a motive can be found only in the faith and ideals of organized religion; and the great task that is before us is to join this belief and the consequent action with the scientific knowledge and efficient techniques of economic reform." [CDCP 1945: p.136]

Du Bois offers further support for the importance of, or indeed the necessity for, religious justifications for social uplift.

[. . .] "I must just as frankly acknowledge that the majority of the best and earnest people of this world are today organized in religious groups, and that without the co-operation of the richness of their emotional experience, and the unselfishness of their aims, science stands helpless before crude fact and selfish endeavor. The

reason for this religious majority may be inexperience and lack of education; it may be divine grace and human sin. Whatever it is, the fact is unquestionable today." [CDCP 1945: p.137]

Du Bois seems similar to King in praising religion, but there is a crucial difference.

4.4. Du Bois and King on Religion

[Section 4.4. Summary.]

- King's paraphrase of T. Parker: "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice".
- Hence, for King: certitude about the ontological content of religious faith.
- **However**, for Du Bois: science and a pragmatic method must mediate between religious tenets and the world.
- Thus, for Du Bois: no certitude that justice will prevail.
- Nonetheless, for Du Bois: despite unknowability and uncertainty, **our actions require guidance and justification.**
- For both Du Bois and King: religion is vital to activism.

4.4.1. "The Arc of the Moral Universe"

[46] Du Bois's claim that there are "good reasons" to hope despite normative uncertainty parallels King's idea of the "arc of the moral universe". (See the note below on Theodore Parker for the derivation of this phrase).

[47] For King writing in a 1958 essay published in the *Gospel Messenger*, the civil rights advances of the mid-1960s were years away. Nonetheless, he holds out hope—a hope based on his religious faith—that justice and equality will prevail. King believes that there are "good reasons" (to quote the parallel with Du Bois) on which to hope that things could change. He writes in "Out of the Long Night":

Those of us who call the name of Jesus Christ find something at the center of our faith which forever reminds us that God is on the side of truth and justice. Good Friday may occupy the throne for a day, but ultimately it must give way to the triumph of Easter. Evil may so shape events that Caesar will occupy a palace and Christ a cross, but that same Christ arose and split history into A.D. and B.C. so that even the life of Caesar must be dated by his name. Yes, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." There is something in the universe which justifies William Cullen Bryant in saying, "Truth crushed to earth will rise again." So in Montgomery, Alabama, we can walk and never get weary, because we know that there will be a great camp meeting in the promised land of freedom and justice. [King OTLN 1958: 14] [Observe that "the arc of the moral universe" statement is enclosed by quotation marks, thereby indicating that it or its inspiration derives from another, although not explicitly named.]

For King, history offers a justification for Christian faith in the triumph of right in society: a conventional form by which to designate the current era and its predecessor is A.D. and B.C. Theodore Parker in the mid-19th century uses words similar to King's and offers a similar justification for holding that justice will succeed in the universe.

[Note 5—Theodore Parker's "Moral Universe".]

Theodore Parker (1810-1860) was a Unitarian Universalist minister and abolitionist. In his third sermon, "Justice and the Conscience", contained within *Ten Sermons of Religion* (Parker 1853) he provides the basis for King's "arc of the moral universe" quotation.

"Look at the facts of the world. You see a continual and progressive triumph of the right. I do not pretend to understand the moral universe, the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways. I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. But from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice. Things refuse to be mismanaged long. Jefferson trembled when he thought of slavery and remembered that God is just. Ere long all America will tremble. The Stuarts in England were tyrannical and strong: respectable and peaceful men kept still a while, and bore the tyranny, but men who loved God and his justice more than house and land fled to the wilderness, and built up a troublesome commonwealth of Puritans." [Parker 1853: pp.84-85]

King's paraphrase of Parker has become a widely used and well recognized quotation. Taylor Branch writes that the "moral universe" quotation is "one of King's favorites lines" (1988: p.197n).

[End of Note 5.]

[48] As I have previously indicated, Du Bois however does not accept the certitude that justice will prevail. Because we cannot know for certain, we can only act in the world according to our values of equality and freedom and our ideals of justice.

4.4.2. Religion and "Pragmatic Fact"

[49] Indeed, there is a significant difference between Du Bois's view on religion and King's—just as with parallel lines: the gap between the lines may be small, but the lines never cross. Du Bois writes in *Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace*:

[. . .] "I cannot believe that any chosen body of people or special organization of mankind [i.e., organized religion] has received a direct revelation of ultimate truth which is denied to earnest scientific effort. I admit readily that it would be most satisfactory if instead of occupying a little island of knowledge in the midst of vast stretches of unknown truth, we could with conviction and utter faith plant ourselves on a completely revealed knowledge of the ends and aims of the universe. But no matter how satisfying this would be, it does not therefore follow that it is true, or that those who assert it and believe in it have the right to persecute and condemn those who cannot accept urgent desire, or myth and fairy tale, as valid truth. It may well be that God has revealed ultimate knowledge to babes and sucklings, but that is no reason why I, one who does not believe this miracle, should surrender to infants the guidance of my mind and effort. No light of faith, no matter how kindly and beneficent, can in a world of reason guide human beliefs to truth unless it is continually tested by pragmatic fact." [CDCP 1945: p.137]

Accordingly, Du Bois references science and the pragmatic method as a way to mediate religious tenets in relation to the world. He does not accept King's certitude on the ontological content of religious faith.

[Note 6—Du Bois on Science (Caveats).]

Regarding Du Bois's views on science, two caveats must be mentioned.

First, in works such as *Color and Democracy* (CDCP 1945) and "Of the Ruling of Men" (OROM 1920), Du Bois is very optimistic about the role of research, especially in the natural sciences. He seems to assume that the researchers will be able to reach an understanding among themselves about the studies and the corresponding results, and that they will be able to minimize or counterbalance biases tainting research and its conclusions (SOPE 1937).

However, Du Bois also discusses in other works that research can be flawed and that researchers can be biased: *Black Reconstruction* (BREC 1935) is a notable example of his criticism, as are other texts challenging the pseudo-science of race, including "The Negroes

of Farmville, Virginia" (NFVA 1897) and *The Philadelphia Negro* (TPN 1899).

Second, Du Bois seems rather optimistic that there will be more or less one accord between citizens and their democratic participation, politicians and bureaucrats in their policymaking roles, and scientists and other scholars with regard to their research findings. He nonetheless does not specify how to reconcile any possible tensions between and among the three groups. Such would be important, especially considering the current case of climate science and the difficulty of reconciling the divergent views between citizens, environmentalists, government bureaucrats, elected officials, and industry groups.

[End of Note 6.]

[Note 7—King on Science and Faith.]

On 16 August 1967 King delivers the speech "Where Do We Go From Here?" at the Eleventh Annual SCLC Convention in Atlanta, Georgia. Therein he argues that, even if you can scientifically predict the future or do possess a great understanding of nature, all of that knowledge is worthless without acknowledging that God is love. He speaks:

[. . .] "If you are seeking the highest good, I think you can find it through love. And the beautiful thing is that we aren't moving wrong when we do it, because John was right, God is love. He who hates does not know God, but he who loves has the key that unlocks the door to the meaning of ultimate reality.

"And so I say to you today, my friends, that you may be able to speak with the tongues of men and angels; you may have the eloquence of articulate speech; but if you have not love, it means nothing. Yes, you may have the gift of prophecy; you may have the gift of scientific prediction and understand the behavior of molecules; you may break into the storehouse of nature and bring forth many new insights; yes, you may ascend to the heights of academic achievement so that you have all knowledge; and you may boast of your great institutions of learning and the boundless extent of your degrees; but if you have not love, all of these mean absolutely nothing." [King WDWG 1967]

For King, unlike Du Bois, the world has meaning that is not subject to a pragmatic evaluation of its workable tenets.

[End of Note 7.]

4.4.3. What They Share

[50] Although different in several ways, King and Du Bois share an important similarity. This is well exemplified when Du Bois sends King a telegram in March 1956 (according to the Credo metadata). In early 1956 the Montgomery Bus Boycott has just started and on the evening of 30 January King's house is bombed. The content of Du Bois's telegram quotes the Lutheran hymn "Fear Not, O Little Flock":

Fear not O little flock the foe
That madly seeks thine overthrow
Dread not its rage and power
What though thy courage often faints
Its seeming power o'er God's saints
Lasts but a little hour
[TMLK 1956; The original contained all capital letters, no punctuation, and line indentations by varying amounts of blank space.]

Its message, whether as a telegram or a hymn, seems clear. For both Du Bois and King religion will serve a vital role in our activism for justice—then as well as now.

SECTION 5: 21st Century Relevance

5.1. Nescience Nowadays

[Section 5.1. Summary.]

- Du Boisian nescience can illuminate 21st Century social concerns.
- Art as activism: Expressions of experiences and expressions of alternate future societies.
- "Excluded wisdom" is needed by policy makers.
- The normative uncertainty of values and ideals highlights human agency and the role of subjectivity in struggles for justice.

[51] Du Bois never denies the important role of social research, whether the natural or social sciences, or the humanities. Indeed, the knowledge gained is of immense value to challenge injustice. Yet we cannot be stymied by the lack of objective information gained. Du Bois's nescience, accordingly, offers justifications for addressing the concerns of protest groups and social movements and for including their insights into policymaking.

[52] How does Du Boisian nescience help us to better understand contemporary issues and debates?

- a) As his idea of "excluded wisdom" implicates, individuals—and vitally, members of marginalized groups—possess knowledge that cannot be grasped easily, fully, or at all by research methods that aggregate data about persons into reductive means, medians, and formulae.
- b) The normative uncertainty of values and ideals, in Du Bois's thought, foregrounds the importance of human agency and the subjectivity integral to social progress and the struggles against injustice, especially the value of equality (e.g., personal respect and equality of opportunity).
- c) Du Boisian nescience also speaks to artistic movements because it supports the use of our political and literary imaginations to promote alternative societies, and indeed universes, that address the existing life-situations faced by the marginalized. Such alternative worlds challenge, via the agency of Africana peoples, the oppressive practices and mythic fabrications created by White supremacy.

5.2. Recent Examples

[Section 5.2. Summary.]

- Afrofuturism embodies the literary imagination that Du Bois advocates.
- The Black Lives Matter Movement and the Dakota Access Pipeline protests exemplify the importance of "excluded wisdom" for policymakers.
- The Moral Mondays movement illustrates that, even if equality, freedom, and justice are not always evident, motivated and often religiously inspired persons still struggle onwards.

5.2.1. The Current Relevance of Nescience

[53] Du Boisian nescience offers us a conceptual way by which to interpret the significance of issues in the new century. Here I will briefly examine four issues and indicate how nescience is important for activism and politics: Afrofuturism, the Black Lives Matter Movement, the Dakota Access Pipeline and its protests, and the Moral Mondays protests.

[54] Note that the examples are brief for the purposes of this presentation. More details may be found in Section 8, which contains suggested resources that might be of interest.

5.2.2. Afrofuturism

[55] The sciences, because they rely on evidence, face an inherent difficulty. They can predict trends into the future, based on patterns in the data. But they cannot know-about the future where there is no evidence, or if not all of the evidence is or can be gathered. Science fiction creators can travel where science cannot: they can generate new realms and new forms of social relationships whenever and wherever the evidence is scanty or non-existent in the here and now. As a multifarious literary form, Afrofuturism addresses the paucity of person of color in science fiction, while simultaneously challenging the lingering White supremacy that denies Africana agency. Afrofuturists craft worlds and situations originating from the life experiences of Africana peoples. They incorporate futuristic technologies of space and time travel, often with spiritual and mystical dimensions, that are intentionally wielded in the interests of the marginalized and oppressed. Those considered to be Afrofuturists include a range of writers, musicians, film directors, and artists broadly defined, such as Steven Barnes, Octavia Butler, George Clinton, Samuel R. Delany, Wanuri Kahiu, Janelle Monáe, Nnedi Okorafor, and Sun Ra (Dery 1994; Womack 2013).

[56] As regards Du Boisian nescience, Afrofuturism incarnates the literary imagination that he espouses so as to better depict the humanity of persons of color and to fight against the one-dimensional stereotypes rife in his era and still present decades later. Du Bois is increasingly being studied as a proto-Afrofuturist (e.g., Brown & Rusert 2015; Elia 2016; Yaszek 2006).

5.2.3. The Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM)

[57] Motivated by the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in August 2014, the Black Lives Matter movement has organized as independent groups in various U.S. cities over the last few years. As such, BLM is a non-hierarchical movement. Nonetheless, the movement utilizes social media and the Internet to coordinate activities among the different groups and to encourage participation. BLM-related events focus on cases of violence committed by the police or others against African American men and women. The chapters also support other marginalized identities of Africana persons, including LGBTQ, differentially abled, and those with prison records (BlackLivesMatter.com 2017; Joseph 2017).

[58] As regards Du Boisian nescience, the BLM movement emphasizes that, despite all of the knowledge about violence directed against Africana persons, the direct experiences and knowledge of Africana persons is not possible for Whites. Consequently, such issues become a matter of existential concern for some of the population, and thereby their "excluded wisdom" is vital to consider in policymaking.

5.2.4. The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) Protests

[59] The Dakota Access Pipeline travels from North Dakota to Illinois, linking oil fields in the former to processing facilities in the latter. Some of the controversy arises from the fact that the pipeline passes beneath a lake, Lake Oahe in North Dakota, deemed sacred by the Native Americans in the area, who also use it as a water supply. Native Americans there and from around the U.S.A., as well as supporters among environmental and climate-justice groups, protested the pipeline. They also set up a camp within the Standing Rock Indian Reservation (North and South Dakota) in which the protestors, calling themselves the Water Protectors, lived for months. However, after losing various legal actions, the protest camp was struck by late 2016. Energy Transfer Partners, who own the DAPL, eventually completed construction and started pumping operations in May 2017 (Aisch & Lai 2017; The Intercept 2017).

[60] As regards Du Boisian nescience, such marginalized indigenous peoples will possess the "excluded wisdom" that the dominant power structures have long denied, but which could assist in the sustainable usage and management of natural resources.

5.2.5. Moral Mondays

[61] The North Carolina NAACP is credited with organizing Moral Mondays in 2013 and 2014. The Reverend William Barber is the spokesperson for the events, designed to oppose the policies put forth by the Republican-majority N.C. General Assembly. As it started and continues, Moral Mondays involve protestors, often in the thousands, who march on the state capitol at Raleigh. Arrests occur frequently because of the non-violent direct actions in which the protestors engage. The future of Moral Mondays, as the organizers maintain, involves widening the focus beyond North Carolina to focus also on opposing Republican policies in various U.S. states. The strategy will entail fusing individual progressive organizations into broader progressive coalitions (Repairers of the Breach N.D.; see also Hunter-Gault 2017; Wootson 2017).

[62] As regards Du Boisian nescience, his idea of the normative uncertainty of values and ideals is pertinent. We pursue the values of equality and freedom and hope for justice, even if such values are not necessarily evident or else are frustratingly ephemeral. Nevertheless, motivated and inspired individuals and groups will struggle towards those ideals of a more inclusive and just world.

5.2.6. Further Examples Exist

[63] Du Boisian nescience as a way to illuminate social actions is not limited to the few cases described in this presentation. Du Bois's idea that there are consequences to what we cannot know also can be applied to other cases in the U.S.A. and the world.

SECTION 6: In Closing (and Appendices)

6.1. Knowledge AND Nescience

[Section 6.1. Summary.]

- Du Boisian nescience does not foreclose activism, but rather offers other strategies to use.
- Does Du Boisian nescience deny reason? Du Bois supports reason via pragmatic evaluation of experiences with our actions in the world.
- History will not forget Du Bois and King because their struggles for justice are also our struggles.

6.1.1. Unavoidable Activism

[64] King's list of social problems at the end on "Honoring Dr. Du Bois" reads much like a list that we could compile 50 years later. As a consequence, King's words abide because social problems persist into the 21st Century. Today we still need knowledge to guide our activism for social justice. Du Bois in his research and King in his tribute recognize the importance of studying the why and how of who and what we observe.

[65] As I have sought to demonstrate in the presentation, for Du Bois, our lack of knowledge and the uncertainty of some forms of knowledge does not preclude us from acting in the world. Indeed, our nescience is part of our being in the world. We cannot escape activism in its myriad forms because we are embodied in the social relationships that constitute our

existence. Du Bois along with King stress the need for activism motivated by values and ideals that cannot be substantiated or justified solely by empirical research. Indeed, our social duty is also part of our being in the world.

6.1.2. Considerations

[66] Some may question: Does Du Bois risk irrationalism by focusing on the unknowable? That is to ask whether Du Bois's ideas on unknowability deny reason and the rational ways that humans can study and explain reality? Du Boisian unknowability, I argue, supports both reason and scientific inquiry: as the passage quoted above from his *Color and Democracy* indicates, "No light of faith, no matter how kindly and beneficent, can in a world of reason guide human beliefs to truth unless it is continually tested by pragmatic fact." (CDCP 1945: p.137) Moreover, we can infer that, although we may not have empirical confirmation of the worth of normative values, this does not imply that every action is permitted. Normative uncertainty, as I have discussed herein, does not preclude or hinder the use of rational means by which to guide or ground actions in the world.

[67] Here Du Bois's understanding of what he calls "Jamesian pragmatism" emerges. For him, Jamesian pragmatism is a method that seeks to evaluate the "workable logic" of hypotheses—e.g., that values like equality are worthwhile—if we assume their truth (LHA 1956).

[68] Let us act as if respect and equality are worthwhile values to practice. What world might be created by doing good deeds, by caring about the well-being of neighbors and those farther away, and by treating people with equal dignity? The values are normative, but the consequences of so acting would be observable and thereby could be discussed, presumably, in a reasonable manner. Conversely, acting with disrespect to others and promoting unequal opportunities for some in society likewise will have consequences, consequences that can be historically documented.

6.1.3. Abiding Quest

[69] King and Du Bois continue to inspire us in the 21st Century. To use the language of "Honoring Dr. Du Bois" history will not forget either of them because both have proven necessary in our struggles for justice, freedom, and equality. But such a bold statement about history itself not forgetting must be examined. History is not a thing external to humans and their actions. History is made, produced, interpreted, written, recorded, and documented by humans themselves.

[70] Through their words and actions Du Bois and King have asked:

- How are our stories being documented and interpreted as history?
- Which assumptions about human agency are stated and which are unstated?
- What values and ideals do the storytellers and retellers put forward?
- Which events, thoughts, and people are covered, and importantly, need to be recovered?

Du Bois and King abide today because their critical questions are our questions. Their quest for justice is our quest.

— FINIS —

6.2. Appendix 1: Sources on the Du Bois Centennial

[71] Various sources provide information on the memorial to W.E.B. Du Bois, the "International Cultural Evening", which was held on 23 February 1968 at Carnegie Hall in New York City. This appendix lists materials that are freely accessible online as well as print resources (both of which are referenced in Section 7.3.).

6.2.1. The Credo Repository

[72] Credo is the repository interface for accessing the W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (and others) at the Special Collections and University Archives of the University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. The Credo repository provides the program of the event, entitled "The Du Bois Centennial: An International Year". (Note that the collection contains two copies of the same program: the second item specifies the year 1977 in the metadata). The Credo repository provides one other document pertaining to the commemoration: the pamphlet "Honoring Dr. Du Bois" that was published by Freedomways Associates (undated, but the metadata indicates 1970). Searching for "Freedomways" will also yield more than forty other documents, mostly correspondence of the magazine to and from W.E.B. Du Bois and Shirley Graham Du Bois: search results.

6.2.2. Biographical Sources

[73] Taylor Branch in *At Canaan's edge: America in the King years, 1965-68*, the third tome in a large-scale three-volume biography, briefly described the Du Bois commemoration and summarized King's tribute at the event (Branch 2006: 703-704). Lewis Baldwin observed that King in the centennial speech lauded Du Bois's preservation of Black heritage (2016: 187). David Levering Lewis in his biography noted in a few sentences King's participation, writing that "Martin's speech was eloquently moving." (D.L. Lewis 1978: 376) However, other biographies do not include King's participation at the centennial: e.g., Bruns 2006; T. Jackson 2008; Selby 2008; Sunnemark 2004; and Willis 2009. Essays that emphasize the radical aspects of King often incorporate his Du Bois tribute, such as Halpern 2015; Ruprecht 2016; Sekou 2014; and West 2015 (p.113).

[74] Tavis Smiley mentions King's speech and also describes his demeanor:

"Although Doc strikes many in the audience, including his friend Stanley Levison, as tired and listless, he nonetheless uses the occasion to reassert his belief in radical solutions to social ills." [Smiley (with David Ritz) 2014]

This point was made in the FBI's declassified surveillance files (see below).

[75] Over the past few decades there has been a slowly increasing body of scholarly studies and academic resources on Du Bois that mention King's tribute. They include, for example, Baker & Smith 2015 (p.115); Balfour 2011 (pp.ix-x); Blight 1996 (p.275); Carson 2018; Ford 2014; Georgia Writers Hall of Fame 2000; Horne 1985 (p.5); Morris 2017 (pp.11-12); Rabaka 2008 (p.162); Sinitiere 2012; and Zuckerman 2000 (p.3). A few book-length biographies briefly reference "Honoring Dr. Du Bois", such as Marable 1986 (p.xv) and Mullen 2016 (p.149). However, other books of biography do not refer to the tribute: e.g., S.G. Du Bois 1971; Horne 2010; and D.L. Lewis 1993 & 2000.

6.2.3. Carnegie Hall

[76] I sought information on the resources housed in the archives at Carnegie Hall, the venue of the Du Bois centennial on 23 February 1968. Gino Francesconi, Director of the Carnegie Hall Archives and Museum, responded via email indicating that their collection does not contain many items related to the event (Francesconi 2018). Information and items that are available online include the following:

- a) The event is situated within a timeline of other events and performances at the venue. It briefly summarizes the purpose of the event.
- b) The Performance History database (search) contains an entry, labeled the "W.E.B. Du Bois 100th Birthday Celebration", that lists the program participants (although James Baldwin is not included).
- c) A Facebook posting on 16 January 2017—the Martin Luther King federal holiday—one sentence from King's tribute was quoted and a photograph of him at the podium was displayed.
- d) A twitter posting on 23 February 2014 presents an image file of one page from the event program; it is autographed by Martin Luther King, Jr. and James Baldwin.

The Carnegie Hall archives director also indicated that there is no audio or video recording of the event (Francesconi 2018).

6.2.4. High Museum of Art (Atlanta)

[77] The High Museum of Art has one photograph of the 1968 Du Bois centennial. It depicts King and James Baldwin, who were photographed together by James Hinton.

6.2.5. *The Worker*

[78] Mike Davidow wrote an article entitled "Wide Range of Notables at Memorial to DuBois" (1968). It was printed in *The Worker* periodical on 3 March 1968. A page facsimile version of the article is found in the declassified FBI surveillance file on James Baldwin (Baldwin FBI File 17 via Archive.org at p.11). Note that a text version of Davidow's article was printed in the *Congressional Record* on 12 March 1968.

6.2.6. Declassified FBI Files

[79] More information is available from declassified FBI files, which focus on the results of the surveillance of those considered to be subversive and anti-American, including many in the civil rights movement.

[80] The declassified FBI surveillance file on James Baldwin (specifically, individual files 15, 16, and 17 at Archive.org) contains observations of several informants who attended and then debriefed with the bureau. The informants noted those who presented at the memorial, often briefly describing the comments made or the actions performed (such as singing or dancing). Several informants listed a few names of those in the audience as well as indicating that Carnegie Hall was filled or nearly filled to capacity.

[81] The declassified FBI surveillance files on Martin Luther King, Jr. likewise mentions his participation at the February 1968 celebration of Du Bois, but with fewer materials than in James Baldwin's FBI file. Much of the information references King's friend and advisor Stanley Levison.

[82] On 19 November 1967 King asked Levison if he should speak at the event sponsored by *Freedomways* and Levison replied that he would gather further details before giving an answer (M.L.K. File 80 via Archive.org at p.57). In another document within King's FBI file we read a more detailed description of that particular King-Levison conversation.

"A confidential source, who has furnished reliable information in the past, learned on November 19, 1967, that on that date, Stanley Levison and Martin Luther King, Jr., discussed an invitation which King had received to attend the one hundredth anniversary celebration of the birth of the [sic] W.E.B. DuBois to be held in Carnegie Hall, New York City, in February, 1968. King wanted Levison's opinion on accepting this invitation. King said that he did not know who is sponsoring the celebration, that Jack O'Dell had called him once, but that another person had been the main caller. He added that he had also been urged to attend by a person he met at a luncheon. King noted that there will be only one speech at the luncheon [i.e., Du Bois celebration] and that they want him to make it. He feels that he should accept because of the contribution that DuBois made to Negroes. He said that he knows "Freedomways" magazine has something to do with it.

"Levison stated that he would want to know the sponsoring group so that it could be determined if it is reasonably broad or very narrow. He said that if the sponsorship is narrow, including just people around "Freedomways", it should be broadened." [King FBI File 77 via Archive.org at p.164]

The declassified FBI surveillance file on Stanley Levison repeats this information but in less detail (see Levison FBI File 18 via Archive.org at pp.28-29).

[83] On 24 February 1968, the day after the Du Bois centennial, an FBI document reported a conversation between Levison and Clarence Jones (another advisor to King). This report provides us with the former's description of the actual event, as conveyed via the FBI source:

"A confidential source, who has furnished reliable information in the past, furnished information on February 23, 1968, reflecting that Stanley Levison was going to meet Martin Luther King, Jr., on the night of February 23, 1968, at Kennedy International Airport, New York City, to take him to the "Freedomways" Magazine sponsored affair at Carnegie Hall, New York City, that night.

"The same source learned on February 24, 1968, that on that date, Stanley Levison told Clarence Jones about the affair sponsored by "Freedomways" magazine on the night of February 23, 1968. Levison said that he believed it illustrates the degree of despair and depression prevalent in progressive circles. He described it as the "deadest meeting" he had ever seen and said that people are depressed because they are frustrated over the Vietnam War and also feel there are no answers to riots in the streets. Referring to Martin Luther King's speech, he said that King has never read anything as badly. Levison attributed this to King feeling uncomfortable at the meeting. He said that King felt it was his duty to pay a tribute to (W.E.B.) DuBois but also knew it was not really his (type of) crowd. He said that King read his speech as if he did not understand what he was reading." [King FBI File 78 via Archive.org at p.13]

I was not able to locate this conversation in the FBI file on Stanley Levison.

[84] The King FBI surveillance files summarized Davidow's article on the event and also analyzed *Freedomways* as a Communist magazine (M.L.K. FBI File 79 via Archive.org at, respectively, pp.146, 155).

[End of Appendix 1.]

6.3. Appendix 2: Du Bois on Art

[85] Regarding art and the artist (as discussed in Section 3.2.), does Du Bois's "Postscript" in

the *Ordeal of Mansart* accord with his earlier "Criteria of Negro Art"? As a short reply, there is a somewhat different focus in the two works, which are separated by three decades. In the "Postscript" Du Bois examines how the scholar of history becomes an author of historical fiction. Yet in "Criteria" he separates the scholar/scientist from the artist/author. To reframe the question: are Du Bois's views on art and artists similar across the two works?

[86] Du Bois in the "Postscript" indicates that some or much of the knowledge of the past is unrecoverable, and that becomes the justification to use the imagination to fill in the gaps. Yet the imagination still might be able to create a story that includes, as he writes, "a fair version of the truth of an era, or a group of facts about human history." (PSOM 1957: ¶ 7)

[87] Du Bois in "Criteria of Negro Art" does not explicitly state that the artist cannot use the "facts of human history" in the fiction created. Nonetheless, he offers a stark dichotomy between the scholar and the artist. He writes:

"Thus it is the bounden duty of black America to begin this great work of the creation of Beauty, of the preservation of Beauty, of the realization of Beauty, and we must use in this work all the methods that men have used before. And what have been the tools of the artist in times gone by? First of all, he has used the Truth — not for the sake of truth, not as a scientist seeking truth, but as one upon whom Truth eternally thrusts itself as the highest handmaid of imagination, as the one great vehicle of universal understanding. Again artists have used Goodness — goodness in all its aspects of justice, honor and right — not for sake of an ethical sanction but as the one true method of gaining sympathy and human interest."
[CNA 1926: ¶ 27]

It is in that context Du Bois writes in "Criteria" about the positive propaganda of depicting the good aspects of members of any and all races:

"Thus all Art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent." [CNA 1926: ¶ 29]

This passage and these views by Du Bois evoke many responses in his time and ours.

[88] For example, Zora Neale Hurston argues in the essay "Art and Such" that Race Men and Race Women, such as Du Bois himself and the fictional characters he creates, promote one rather limited range of experiences (Hurston 1938). She holds that African Americans are also individuals who embody a broad range of ideas, goals, and life situations. Accordingly, artists of all aesthetic forms must express this individual diversity, regardless of—or in spite of—the political goals of the race. In her essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" she conveys her personal experiences of blackness and individuality, and her exaltations, aggravations, and reflections on being a Black woman in the U.S.A. (Hurston 1928).

[89] In "Criteria of Negro Art" Du Bois does not specifically consider how the role of the scholar/scientist, under conditions of nescience, might also take on the role of the author as activist.

[End of Appendix 2.]

SECTION 7: Works Cited

7.1. Works by W.E.B. Du Bois

Note: The in-text citations to Du Bois's works include an abbreviated title and year of publication. Below, the works are alphabetized by their abbreviated titles.

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7.2. Works by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Note: The in-text citations to King's works include an abbreviated title and year of speech or publication. Below, the works are alphabetized by their abbreviated titles.

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SECTION 8: Suggested Resources

8.1. Suggested Resources: Texts

8.1.1. Suggested Texts by W.E.B. Du Bois

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8.2. Suggested Resources: Websites and Blogs

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- Credo Repository, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. Du Bois Library at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. N.D. URL: online searching. Also available online: Finding Aid for the Du Bois Papers.
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8.3. Suggested Resources: Videos and Podcasts

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**"The morning breaks over blood-stained hills.
We must not falter, we may not shrink.
Above are the everlasting stars."
— W.E.B. Du Bois, "Address to the Country" (ATTC 1906)**

**• Thank you for your time.
— Robert W. Williams**

