

REPOSITIONING RACE



PROPHETIC RESEARCH IN A
POSTRACIAL OBAMA AGE

EDITED BY
SANDRA L. BARNES, ZANDRIA F. ROBINSON,
AND EARL WRIGHT II



Am I My Brother's and My Sister's Keeper?

W. E. B. Du Bois's New Talented Tenth

EARL WRIGHT II

University of Cincinnati

In 1903 William Edward Burghardt Du Bois penned a seminal statement on Black American leadership. Du Bois's theory of the talented tenth champions the development of a cadre of Black Americans willing to engage in ethical leadership while sacrificing their personal ambitions to improve the social, economic, and physical condition of the members of their race. While the theory mandates members of this fraternity to be ethical and self-sacrificing, historically, the talented tenth have been misconstrued as college-educated persons who, after obtaining their degrees, become elitist, self-serving, and largely unconcerned with the plight of ordinary Black Americans and leery of involving themselves in situations that threaten their economic stability. This misinterpretation of Du Bois's challenge to his fraternity members is the impetus for this endeavor. This inquiry (1) highlights the discrepancies between the ideal type talented tenth member and the many historical misinterpretations; (2) highlights Du Bois's revised 1948 talented tenth theory; and

(3) extends his theory on leadership beyond its present state. While previous explorations into this area highlight the influence of Alexander Crummell, Frederick Douglass, and Henry L. Morehouse on the development of Du Bois's philosophy of leadership, this investigation departs from the existing literature with its emphasis on misperceptions of Du Bois's theory on Negro leadership (Dennis 1977; Gates and West 1996). By reconstructing Du Bois's talented tenth theory, I draw on the prophetic tradition in Black sociology of systematically uncovering truths and correcting enduring misconceptions. What follows is an examination of the origin of Du Bois's theory of the talented tenth.

Henry L. Morehouse's *Tenth Man*

In 1896 Henry L. Morehouse, the man for whom Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, is named, wrote the article "The Talented Tenth." Morehouse's article, albeit written years prior to their public sparring, can be viewed as an attempt by someone situated in the midst of the ideological debate between Booker T. Washington and Du Bois to forge common ground between the giant figures of Black American economic and intellectual life. While Morehouse expresses no preference for either vocational or liberal arts education in his essay, he suggests that the exceptional persons within a society should serve as its leaders. Morehouse (1896), articulating his ideas on leadership seven years prior to Du Bois's similarly titled essay, states, "Industrial education is good for the nine; the common English branches are good for the nine; that tenth man ought to have the best opportunities for making the most of himself for humanity and God" (p. 1). The lynchpin of Morehouse's talented tenth is the development of a cadre of leaders, regardless of educational dogma, who will embrace the challenge of bettering the social, economic, and physical condition of humankind while guided by a spiritual base. Morehouse's vision of leadership is captured in his proclamation that the tenth man should be the one to whom "the many look [to] for suggestion and advice in important matters" (p. 1). Clearly, for Morehouse, his idea of the tenth man rests on the belief that there must be a critical mass of persons who are prepared and willing to serve in positions of leadership while dedicated to improving the social condition of their compatriots. This idea is reflective of the social gospel movement of the era. "The Social Gospel . . . emphasized the human aspects of Christianity . . . [and was guided by the idea that] the salvation of society replaced the salvation of an individual soul as the

principal religious goal" (Chudacoff and Smith 181). For Morehouse, and later Du Bois, the salvation of society should be led by exceptional persons whom they label the talented tenth. While it is common knowledge that Du Bois borrows the title of his cadre of race leaders from Morehouse, the 1896 essay by the former corresponding secretary of Northern Baptist Home Missions Society is also useful because it clarifies various misconceptions concerning Du Bois's theory.

First, historically, many had criticized Du Bois's theory on leadership as elitist because some have literally interpreted his phrase "talented tenth" to refer to leadership of the race by an actual 10% of the Black population. Nowhere in Du Bois's writings on the talented tenth does he refer to leadership of the race being shepherded by an actual 10% of the Black population. As the passages above evidences, Du Bois clearly borrows Morehouse's phrase of "the tenth man" as the label for his cadre of leaders. Du Bois not only borrows the notion of the tenth man from Morehouse, but he also does so without regard to establishing a specific number of members eligible for admission into his fraternity. Second, despite historical suggestions to the contrary, Du Bois, similar to the position Morehouse took, does not completely oppose Booker T. Washington's educational philosophy. Instead, he desires a balance between liberal arts and vocational education programs. Du Bois ([1903] 1994) refutes the notion that he completely opposes vocational education in *The Souls of Black Folk*:

The bright ideals of the past,—physical freedom, political power, the training of brains and hands,—all these in turn have waxed and waned, until even the last grows dim and overcast. Are they all wrong,—all false? No, not that, but each alone was over-simple and incomplete. (P. 6)

Du Bois, an ardent promoter of the liberal arts, did not support the exclusive development of either education program. As indicated above, he championed a balanced approach to education that awarded equal respect to both philosophies. While Du Bois does not oppose the notion of vocational education for the Negro, he contends that a pragmatic system of developing a lineage of holistically trained teachers and scholars grounded in the liberal arts must be established before advancing to a more comprehensive focus on vocational education. Toward this end, Du Bois ([1903] 1970) states in his talented tenth article:

I would not deny . . . the paramount necessity of teaching the Negro to work . . . or seem to deprecate in the slightest

degree the important part industrial schools must play in the accomplishment of these ends, but I do say, and insist upon it, that it is industrialism drunk with its vision of success, to imagine that its own work can be accomplished without providing for the training of broadly cultured men and women to teach its own teachers, and to teach the teachers of the public schools. (P. 61)

With liberal arts education as the model, Du Bois suggests that the desired outcome of his educational paradigm is students of ethical character who will voluntarily engage in self-sacrificing leadership activities for the benefit of their race. After receiving this specific training, then, members of the talented tenth will be prepared to identify, confront, and ameliorate the social, economic, and physical challenges facing Blacks in America. Although Du Bois is open to the idea of forging more than one educational path to progress for Black Americans, we can surmise that he does not believe Washington shares this notion. Instead, Du Bois believes that he actively propagandizes against liberal arts education programs since, according to Washington ([1903] 1970), "It seems to me that too often mere book education leaves the Negro young man or woman in a weak position" (p. 22). The weak position that Washington may be alluding to is the employability of liberal arts-trained Blacks. While Washington wrestles with the question of whether employment opportunities are available for educated Negroes in the early 1900s, he is resolute in the belief that his vocational education program is ideal since its benefits are immediate employment opportunities and economic security.

Last, the lynchpin of Du Bois's theory on Negro leadership hinges on the willingness of the exceptional members of the race to engage in ethical and self-sacrificing leadership activities for the betterment of the race and society. This idea is also borrowed from Morehouse. Although Morehouse suggests the tenth man should engage in leadership activities to make life better for themselves and humanity in general, Du Bois's theory rests on a similar foundation but with specific regard to Blacks in America. This last point is addressed in detail later, but is essential in understanding the ideal type talented tenth member as proposed by Du Bois and the historical misinterpretations of his theory by subsequent scholars. In order to understand how some misinterpretations of Du Bois's theory evolved, we must review his stated objectives in the original talented tenth essay before outlining how his revised theory clarifies some misinterpretations.

'The Negro race, like all races,
is going to be saved by its exceptional men'

Du Bois's ([1903] 1970) objectives in his seminal essay on Negro leadership are "first to show from the past that the Talented Tenth as they have risen among American Negroes have been worthy of leadership; secondly, to show how these men may be educated and developed; and thirdly, to show their relation to the Negro problem" (p. 34). Du Bois, in fulfilling his first objective, identifies several men and women who, by virtue of their self-sacrificing and ethical leadership activities in defense of the human rights of Black Americans during the years of overt and pernicious American racism, prove themselves worthy of admittance into his fraternity. Notable first generation members of the talented tenth Du Bois lists include Alexander Crummell, Paul Cuffe, James Derham, Frederick Douglass, Lemuel Haynes, Sojourner Truth, David Walker, Phillis Wheatley, and Eli Whitney.

Historically, Du Bois's theory has been criticized as being exclusionary, elitist, and a society reserved for college-educated persons. Although Du Bois's second objective aggressively promotes a college education as the desired prerequisite for membership into the talented tenth, he does make allowances for those of exceptional ability to become members of this group despite not possessing postsecondary credentials, and in some cases, no formal education at all. Speaking directly to the talented tenth status bestowed on non-college-educated Black Americans such as Paul Cuffe, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, David Walker, and Phillis Wheatley, Du Bois ([1903] 1970) states:

Too little notice has been taken of the work which the Talented Tenth among Negroes took in the great abolition crusade. . . . There was Purvis and Remond, Pennington and Highland Garnett, Sojourner Truth and Alexander Crummell, and above all, Frederick Douglass—what would the abolition movement have been without them? . . . Where were these [B]lack abolitionists trained? Some, like Frederick Douglass, were self-trained, but trained liberally; others . . . graduated from famous foreign universities. (P. 42)

This passage indicates that Du Bois knowingly admits into his fraternity men and women who lack college training, thus effectively debunking the long-held belief that membership into this group is based singularly on one's higher education credentials. Du Bois ardently believes the

ideal member of the talented tenth should be college educated, however, more important than one's educational background is the inclusion of persons who have demonstrated exceptional ability and the willingness to be self-sacrificing and ethical leaders for their race. Support for this notion is gleaned from the first sentence of his classic text that reads, "The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men [and women]" (Du Bois [1903] 1970: 33). For many Black Americans, the means by which one demonstrated exceptional ability at the dawn of the twentieth century, in light of laws severely limiting or restricting the ability of Blacks to obtain education credentials, was through civil and human rights activities in defiance of insidious American apartheid. For example, men and women of exceptional ability such as Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth separated themselves from the masses through leadership activities directed at abolishing slavery and promoting human rights. This type of self-sacrifice in the face of potential physical and economic demise forms the very core of leadership Du Bois envisioned. Conclusively, one's admittance into the talented tenth is not singularly dependent on the acquisition of a college education, but, instead, on one's high accomplishments and willingness to engage in self-sacrificing and ethical leadership activities.

Du Bois's ([1903] 1970) third objective challenges the talented tenth to embrace their role in the struggle for the human rights of Blacks in America. He begins this section by asserting that the college-educated Negro "ought to be, the group leader, the man who sets the ideals of the community where he lives, directs its thoughts and heads its social movements" (p. 54). Although Du Bois highlights several immediate issues of concern to soon-to-be members of the talented tenth and simultaneously connects their relationship to the Negro problems, perhaps his most compelling data addressing why an exceptional cadre of Blacks serving in leadership positions is needed can be gleaned from some of the findings of the Atlanta University studies.

In January 1897, Du Bois began a 13-year tenure at Atlanta University where he directed the Atlanta University Studies on the Negro Problems. Although Atlanta University president Horace Bumstead and trustee George G. Bradford initiated the yearly investigations in 1895, the research program began its ascension toward becoming the first American school of sociology upon Du Bois's arrival (Wright 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; Wright and Calhoun 2006). Du Bois's research program at Atlanta University often uncovered data indicating the need for an educated cadre of Black Americans. For example, the 1898 Atlanta University publication, *Some Efforts of American Negroes for Their Own Betterment*, contains data indicating that Black Americans lost money

to unscrupulous insurance companies who charged high principal and interest rates to Blacks since they were acutely aware that "the Freedman [was] noted for his effort to ward off accidents and a pauper's grave by insurance against sickness and death" (Du Bois 1898:19). According to Du Bois, a better educated Black populace would be less likely to succumb to such practices.

This philosophy is also evident in the 1899 Atlanta University publication, *The Negro in Business*. This study focuses on Black-owned businesses and readings of the data suggest that several Black entrepreneurs were vulnerable to racist Whites or deceitful Blacks who preyed on this relatively little-educated and exploitable population. Data indicate that of the twenty-five grocery store owners included in this investigation, only one had college training; nine had common school training; twelve could only read and write, but had no mathematic skills; and three had no education at all. For Du Bois, this case study provides sufficient evidence to support his belief that Black businesses should be controlled by liberal arts-trained persons who would be less likely than their peers to be victimized by deceitful and dishonest persons. While he argues that college-educated persons are the ideal choice to run the businesses discussed, Du Bois presents no data indicating that the businesspersons in the study had been duped out of any monies, nor does he conduct a follow-up investigation to that effect. Last, Du Bois believes an educated Black American populace would more efficiently and effectively operate the institutions within their community. Again, the 1898 study is instructive. In this inquiry Du Bois highlights the misuse of church funds that, if directed differently, could help uplift the Black American community. For example, the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., reported a total 1895 income of \$5,714.09. After expenses were subtracted the church was left with only \$437. The data suggest that expenditures such as the \$2,840 spent on building improvements were unnecessary and took away from the uplift mission of the church. A better use of the funds, according to Du Bois (1898), would include the establishment and support of much-needed social service programs such as orphanages and retirement homes for Black Americans.

Du Bois's principal objective in his original talented tenth essay is to provide a theory of leadership for Black Americans that can be used to improve the social, economic, and physical condition of the race. Ultimately, Du Bois's (1968) utopian vision of Black Americans dedicated to self-sacrifice and ethical leadership is betrayed by his beloved sons and daughters. This revelation leaves the renowned scholar disappointed in his select group of leaders whom he believed chose individual economic

security over group uplift (Du Bois 1968). Contrary to criticisms leveled by Du Bois and subsequent scholars concerning the talented tenth's inability to fulfill the charge bestowed upon them, it is argued here that the talented tenth have been scapegoated for not providing leadership in their community because of the historic and inaccurate interchange of the terms "Black middle class" and "talented tenth."

'These criticisms [are] not fair to my meaning'

A popular criticism of the talented tenth is the notion that after obtaining a college education and ascending to middle- or and upper-class status they become primarily interested in their individual and familial condition with little regard to the masses of Black Americans in lower socioeconomic positions. This criticism is noteworthy inasmuch as the term "talented tenth" has been historically and incorrectly used synonymously with the term "Black middle class" (referred to as BMC). Recent research suggests that accusations of elitism and adherence to rigid American individualism are more applicable to the BMC than talented tenth. Battle and Wright (2002), in the only quantitative test of the talented tenth theory to date, explore the notion that college-educated Black Americans reneged on the charge to engage in leadership activities in their community as Du Bois mandated. Key to answering this research question is their argument that "talented tenth" and "BMC" are not synonymous terms. According to the authors, the talented tenth, similar to Du Bois's ideal type, includes college-educated persons. The Black middle class refers to an individual's socioeconomic background, which encompasses education, income, occupation, or a combination thereof. Thus, according to the authors, one can be a member of the Black middle class without obtaining a college degree, but one cannot be a member of the talented tenth without a college degree. Battle and Wright (2002) conclude:

[T]he multivariate findings of this investigation indicate that members of the talented tenth are currently and significantly engaged in political and community leadership activities in their respective communities. . . . These data indicate that the talented tenth are fulfilling Du Bois' charge to provide leadership for the masses, even in the presence of additional influences. (P. 670)

Battle and Wright effectively debunk the long-held notion that the talented tenth rejected their positions of leadership and abandoned the

Black community. According to the authors, and in defense of criticisms directed at Du Bois's cadre of leaders, the evidence suggests that the Black middle class actually abandoned leadership positions in the Black community, not Du Bois's talented tenth.

Aside from the questionable notion of its abandonment of the Black community, Du Bois's talented tenth has also been harshly criticized because many perceived that he wanted to create a Negro aristocracy. This accusation was a motivating factor in his decision to restate his theory on Negro leadership almost 50 years after his original essay. To criticisms that he desired his body of educated Blacks to be elitist and self-serving and that he was attempting to develop a Black aristocracy, Du Bois ([1948] 1980b) states, "neither of these criticisms were really fair to my meaning, although I can easily see today that it was perfectly natural for critics to draw these conclusions" (p. 1). Far from attempting to groom a brown-skinned cadre of individualistic-minded capitalists, what Du Bois actually has in mind was the amassing of a group of learned individuals who, although in positions of influence and relative power, will not regard themselves separate from the masses, but a part of the those prepared to fight for the human rights of Blacks in America. According to Du Bois ([1948] 1980b), "We [, the talented tenth,] did not regard ourselves as separate or superior to the masses, but rather as a part of the mass which was being equipped [*sic*] and armed for leadership and that leadership was of course for the benefit of the race" (p. 2). Du Bois even challenges the amusing notion that the talented tenth believed they were divinely selected to lead the Black community. He states ([1948] 1980b), "[the talented tenth] should be extremely humble[d] to think that by good fate they had the chance to be educated when others who deserved even more than they did, had no such opportunity" (p. 3). While Du Bois's 1948 rearticulation addresses several misconceptions of his theory, arguably, the most significant contribution of his revised theory of the talented tenth are the prerequisites for membership.

Prerequisites for talented tenth status include quality character and high ethical standards. Du Bois ([1948] 1980b) posits, "In this reorientation of my ideas, my pointing out the new knowledge necessary for leadership and new ideas of race and culture, there still remains that fundamental and basic requirement of character for any successful leadership toward great ideals" (p. 16). That members of the talented tenth, or those in any leadership position, possess quality character and high ethical standards is important to Du Bois because he believes an unethical leader can spoil a successful endeavor. Toward that end, Du Bois concludes that "honesty of character and purity of motive [are]

needed . . . without which no effort succeeds or deserves to succeed" (p. 16). The "willingness to work and make personal sacrifice for solving [the Negro] problems, [is] the first prerequisite [for the talented tenth]" (Du Bois [1948] 1980a:3). Clearly, Du Bois calls on members of his cadre to delay or forgo personal gains in favor of engaging in ethical and self-sacrificing leadership activities for the race. Du Bois clearly states this position in his 1948 rearticulation as he expresses dismay with some members of his beloved group for not upholding this charge. Du Bois ([1948] 1980a) comes to a stark conclusion:

I assumed that with knowledge [of the severity of the Negro problem], sacrifice would automatically follow. In my youth and idealism, I did not realize that selfishness is even more natural than sacrifice. I made the assumption of its wide availability because of the spirit of sacrifice learned in my mission school training. . . . It was from [my experience at Fisk University] that I assumed easily that educated people, in most cases, were going out into life to see how far they could better the world. (P. 3)

Du Bois's ([1948] 1980b) belief that most educated Black Americans had a duty to assist those less fortunate was instilled in him as an undergraduate student at Fisk University. While at Fisk, Du Bois came into contact with faculty who "developed in me, and I am sure the majority of my fellow students, the idea of the Negro problem as being an evangel, a gospel where chosen men were trained and armed, and went out to take the leadership of the mass" (p. 2). Although Du Bois fervently believes in his theory, he notes that his youth and naivety prevented him from garnering a realistic assessment of the possible trap-pings of rigid American individualism and capitalism that were poised to lure this group from its objective. Du Bois ([1948] 1980a) states:

When I came out of college into the world of work I realized that it was quite possible that my plan of training a talented tenth might put in control and power a group of selfish, self-indulgent, well-to-do men, whose basic interest in solving the Negro problem was personal; personal freedom and unhampered enjoyment and use of the world, without any real care or certainly no arousing care as to what became of the real masses of American Negroes, or of the mass of any people. (P. 4)

Written several years before his public condemnation of the talented tenth for their silence during his trial with the U.S. government, Du Bois ([1948] 1980a) foretells of the negative consequence of Black Americans becoming more concerned with ascending to middle-class status than engaging in ethical and self-sacrificing activities for the race: "My Talented Tenth, I could see, might result in a sort of interracial free-for-all, with the devil taking the hindmost and the foremost taking anything they could lay hands on" (p. 4).

Although some of Du Bois's talented tenth chose personal achievements and rewards over self-sacrifice to help the race, he remained resolute in his belief that "the idea of the talented tenth was the idea of sacrifice for the mass of people who were worth the sacrifice and who were going to show the world what could be done by people who were released from slavery" (Du Bois [1948] 1980b:3). Some 50 years after his original articulation, Du Bois recognized the need to provide a more coherent and applicable theory of the talented tenth. The result was a new theory on Negro leadership, which he called the "Doctrine of the Guiding Hundredth."

'Doctrine of the Guiding Hundredth'

In 1948 Du Bois unveiled his reexamined theory on Negro leadership. Describing his new theory, Du Bois ([1948] 1980a) states:

Here comes a new idea of a Talented Tenth: The concept of a group-leadership not simply educated and self-sacrificing but with [a] clear vision of present world conditions and dangers and conducting American Negroes to alliance with culture groups in Europe, America, Asia, and Africa, and looking toward a new culture. We can do it. We have the ability. The only question is, have we the will? (P. 11)

This new conceptualization extends the original charge bestowed on the talented tenth by combining the old principles of college education, self-sacrifice, and ethical leadership with new principles mandating knowledge of world conditions and the development of alliances between Black Americans and the non-American world.

Du Bois's revised theory on Negro leadership, unlike his original articulation, proposes establishing a "talented tenth institute" to train potential members and serve as an organizational base for existing

members. Such an organization will, according to Du Bois, provide members with an institutional base to promote a coherent and unified strategy for addressing issues of importance to Black Americans. Centralizing the mission and objectives of the talented tenth prevents individual members from engaging in fragmented and disjointed activities under the banner of the talented tenth. Instead, members will collectively engage in strategically designed and proactive campaigns to improve the social, economic, and physical condition of Blacks in America. Du Bois ([1948]1980a) argues that "a national organization of this sort must be prepared to use propaganda, make investigation, plan procedures and even finance projects" (p. 17). He also proposes creating "a directing council composed of educated and specifically trained experts in the main branches of the sciences and the main categories of human work, and a paid executive committee of five or six persons to carry out the program" (p. 11). Ideally, Du Bois champions establishing a new organization singularly focused on bettering the condition of Blacks in America through the development of self-sacrificing men and women of high ethical standards who embrace positions of leadership in their respective communities. However, after much consideration Du Bois ([1948] 1980a) concludes: "To launch such a scheme as a new organization would call for so much time, money and effort, that it would be more practical if an already existing body could be adapted to this work" (p. 11), prompting Du Bois to select Sigma Pi Phi, an existing exclusive fraternity of professional Black American men often referred to as the "Boule," to be the institutional home for his proposed institute. Du Bois briefly considered asking the collective of college-based Black American fraternal organizations to serve as hosts for his institute, but after some consideration he became firm in his selection of Sigma Pi Phi because it was a well-established fraternity of adult men that was not dominated by "rather youthful ideals of the mis-called college spirit" (p. 11). Du Bois was poised to turn over the training of his cadre of Negro leaders to Sigma Pi Phi despite deep concerns.

During a speech at the 44th national convention of Sigma Pi Phi in 1948, Du Bois reveals his new theory on Negro leadership and urges members of the organization to take an active role in developing this program and recruiting and training young members of the talented tenth for service in their respective communities. Du Bois, despite requesting assistance from the Boule in establishing the new talented tenth, delivers a speech highly critical of the aristocratic culture of Sigma Pi Phi. Referring to the elitism of the fraternity, Du Bois ([1948] 1980a) says:

What the guiding idea of Sigma Pi Phi was, I have never been able to learn. I believe it was rooted in a certain exclusiveness and even snobbery for which we all have a yearning even if unconfessed. But such an object belongs to days of peace and security. Today is a time of crisis. (P. 12)

Continuing his critique of Sigma Pi Phi and, circuitously, some members of his talented tenth, Du Bois ([1948] 1980a) states: "Our interests then are not normally with the poor and hungry, yet we are not aware of this; we assume on the one hand our identity with the poor and yet we act and sympathize with the rich, an unconscious and dangerous dichotomy" (p. 14). Du Bois, somewhat surprisingly, continues his speech by asserting, "Theoretically, then, this [Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity] is not an ideal group for the kind of leadership which I have in mind" (p. 14). Despite not being his ideal type, Du Bois continues his speech by outlining the new talented tenth theory and urging the organization to assist him in his endeavor. The scholar concludes his speech by pronouncing, "This, then, is my re-examined and restated theory of the 'Talented Tenth,' which has thus become the doctrine of the 'Guiding Hundredth'" (Du Bois [1948] 1980a:20).

That Du Bois chose the national convention of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity to outline his new theory on Negro leadership—a speech highly critical of many talented tenth members in attendance—resulted in, at best, a lukewarm reception from the audience and, in effect, his virtual banishment from an organization that he had ties with since the 1920s. According to David Levering Lewis (2000), Pulitzer Prize-winning author of two Du Bois biographies:

It was a speech that would have been much better received by the Progressive Party delegates in Convention Hall. . . . [T]he "Talented Tenth Memorial Address" at Wilberforce seems to have marked the beginning of the end of Du Bois' purchase on the political loyalty of the class whose character was synonymous with his name. After the address, *Boule* members left him sitting alone on a campus bench. (P. 538)

In a manner befitting Du Bois, in his attempt to garner support for an important endeavor, he alienates persons who can potentially play a vital role in assuring its success. However, somewhat surprisingly, neither the Boule nor any organization or institution to date has acted on Du Bois's doctrine of the guiding one hundredth.

'Am I my Brother's and my Sister's keeper?'

To date the existing literature includes no scholarly works extending Du Bois's theory of the talented tenth. Quite possibly the ambiguity regarding the theoretical qualifications of Du Bois's offering on Negro leadership is one explanation for the lack of scholarly advances of this theory. If so, then questions concerning the theoretical merit of Du Bois's scholarship have been raised previously and refuted. Elliott Rudwick (1957), author of the singular scholarly analysis of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory for almost 50 years, argues that a major weakness of this school under Du Bois's leadership was its lack of emphasis on theory. Wright (2002c) debunks this notion by arguing that Du Bois uses a grounded theoretical approach whereby the resolutions (theories) offered by this school emerge from the data collected and, therefore, qualify for theory status despite its nontraditional format. According to Wright, the resolutions Du Bois offered are consistent with contemporary conventions regarding how a theory is defined. Specifically, Wright argues (2002b):

If one defines a theory as a set of interrelated statements that attempt to explain, predict, and/or understand social [facts], and that can be replicated and generalizable, then the resolutions offered in the conclusion of each Atlanta University Conference publication qualify as systematic theoretical constructions. Undoubtedly, the presentation of the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory theories did not mirror that of traditional scholars. Despite this fact, should Atlanta University's theoretical contributions be minimized or omitted because, although they qualify for theoretical status according to the strict definition of the term, they do not qualify ideologically? (P. 19)

Similar to the notion that the resolutions both Du Bois and the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory offered constitute legitimate theoretical offerings, I propose here that the talented tenth qualifies for theory status as defined above.

*Du Bois's revised, synthesized, and clearly stated theory of the talented tenth, or the guiding hundredth, is defined as leadership by, ideally, college-educated men and women dedicated to engaging in ethical and self-sacrificing activities on behalf of the race. Members of this exceptional cadre should have superior knowledge of world conditions and its impact on Diasporic Blacks, while forming alliances with world

neighbors in Africa, South America, Asia, and Europe. Importantly, contrary to traditional understandings, the lynchpin of Du Bois's theory hinges on leadership, not simply the acquisition of a liberal arts education. This point is clearly stated in his revised essay when he explains his motivation for developing the theory. Du Bois ([1948] 1980b), reflecting on the origin of his theory almost 50 years prior, states:

It is clear that in 1900, American Negroes were an inferior caste, were frequently lynched and mobbed, widely disfranchised, and usually segregated in the main areas of life. As student and worker at that time, I looked upon them and saw salvation through intelligent leadership; as I said, through a Talented Tenth. And for this intelligence I argued we needed college-trained men. (P. 2)

After examining the above and earlier quotes, Du Bois's clarion call for a talented tenth clearly was based on data he uncovered that compelled him to champion the development of a group of persons to provide leadership in identifying and ameliorating the myriad problems Black Americans experienced in a manner that, ideally, can best be accomplished by college-educated persons. However, I maintain that whether or not one possesses a college education should not take precedence over his or her ability and willingness to engage in self-sacrificing and ethical leadership activities as Du Bois mandated. Unfortunately, Du Bois's emphasis on salvation of the race through intelligent leadership has been historically minimized in favor of interpretations that overly emphasize one's education credentials and the often class-based implications thereof. Although Du Bois was resolute in his belief that the best preparation for future leaders was through the acquisition of a liberal arts college education, more important than individuals' educational credentials is their understanding of the problems impacting Black Americans and their independent acceptance of leadership roles within their community to address those problems.

I extend the theory of the talented tenth by proposing that admission into this group be based on one's answer to the question, "am I my brother's and my sister's keeper?" While simplistic in nature, this prerequisite is essential in bringing to fruition the type of leadership Du Bois envisioned. An affirmative answer to the asked question signals that one voluntarily embraces the charge of the talented tenth as Du Bois proposed. Accordingly, membership into this group is not based on individuals' education credentials, but their willingness to engage in ethical and self-sacrificing leadership activities on behalf of the masses.

Since this extension of Du Bois's theory has no educational prerequisite, an opportunity is provided for nondegreed persons to gain full membership status into this once-exclusive fraternity of college-educated persons. While, as discussed previously, Du Bois's preferred mode of training is liberal arts education, this expansion of the talented tenth embraces the notion that multiple forms of knowledge and ways of knowing exist that may not be learned on a college campus and may be of importance in providing leadership for oppressed or minority groups (Collins 2000; Mannheim 1968).

Rejecting the question, "am I my brother's and my sister's keeper?" is useful in debunking the incorrect notion that all college-educated persons are automatically members of the talented tenth and are thus responsible for leading in their respective communities. One is mindful that in the present and in Du Bois's era, not all college-educated Black Americans embrace Du Bois's ([1948] 1980b) philosophy of leadership. Reflecting on this matter during his college years in the late 1800s, he concludes:

Of course, as I look about me, I might have understood, that all students of Fisk were not persons [who felt compelled to act on behalf of the masses of Negroes]. There was no lack of small and selfish souls; there were among the student body, careless and lazy fellows; and there were especially sharp young persons, who received the education very cheaply at Fisk University, with the distinct and single-minded idea, of seeing how much they could make out of it for themselves, and nobody else. (P. 3-4)

This extension of Du Bois's theory is significant inasmuch as it provides an escape route for those not interested in embracing his leadership charge. Additionally, I suggest that this new notion of the talented tenth helps eliminate charges of elitism that, however historically misconstrued as discussed earlier, have accompanied the theory for more than 100 years. By destroying the myth of elitism I believe that new relationships among disparate groups focusing on improving the condition of Blacks in America can be developed and existing relationships strengthened. Ultimately, this extended conceptualization of the talented tenth promotes the merging of like-minded individuals and institutions from different backgrounds (i.e., educators, grass-roots activists, politicians, church leaders, etc.) to engage in uplift activities to address the statistical and empirical data highlighting the grave contemporary plight of Black Americans, especially males. This extension of the talented

tenth theory is also useful because it does not attempt to mandate membership status or leadership responsibilities upon those not willing to embrace the challenge. Also, it does not mandate that one possess a college education to be a member. Instead, this extended theory of the talented tenth rests on one's voluntary answer to the question, "am I my brother's and my sister's keeper?" Only after an affirmative answer is an individual expected to engage in proactive leadership activities as Du Bois mandated.

Conclusion

The objectives of this inquiry were to highlight the discrepancies between the ideal type talented tenth member and the many historical misinterpretations of Du Bois's concept; highlight Du Bois's 1948 revised theory on Black American leadership; and extend the theory beyond its present state. Some of the misconceptions addressed via the first objective include that the origin of the term "talented tenth" came from Henry L. Morehouse; that Du Bois did not champion the leadership of the race by an actual 10% of the population; that Du Bois was not completely opposed to the industrial and vocational philosophy of Booker T. Washington; that the talented tenth included non-college-educated persons; and, that Du Bois did not want to establish a Negro aristocracy. The second objective highlighted Du Bois's revised theory that explicitly focuses on ethical and self-sacrificing leadership, knowledge of world conditions, and the development of a talented tenth training institute. The third objective of this inquiry extended the theory of the talented tenth by basing admission into this group on one's answer to the question, "am I my brother's and my sister's keeper?" An affirmative answer to this question means that one accepts Du Bois's prophetic mandate to engage in ethical and self-sacrificing leadership activities on behalf of the race, be knowledgeable of world conditions and their impact on Diasporic Blacks, and form alliances with world neighbors in Africa, South America, Asia, and Europe. While some may question the relevance of advancing this theory, few can deny that most statistical data concerning Black Americans in general and Black males specifically are disconcerting. Contributions such as this query may quite possibly lead to barrier-breaking coalitions that address the many concerns of Black Americans. While Black Americans have made many social, economic, and political advances since the early 1900s when Du Bois ([1903] 1994) penned his original theory, it is eerily telling that his words in that seminal essay continue to ring true:

America, the problem is plain before you. Here is a race transplanted through the criminal foolishness of your fathers. Whether you like it or not the millions are here, and here they will remain. If you do not lift them up, they will pull you down. . . . The Talented Tenth of the Negro race must be made leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people. . . . The Negro race, like all other races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men [and women]. (P. 74-75)

Du Bois's words remind us of the significance of the prophetic research to the advancement of Black people in America. Moreover, by reconstructing an accurate articulation of his theory of the talented tenth and applying it to twenty-first-century models of leadership, we continue his prophetic directives for critically challenging racism and advocating for social justice for all marginalized peoples.

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