
EARLHAM

Race Matters at Earlham

by Douglas C. Bennett
President

September 5, 2001

Note: Before this Convocation, we distributed copies of W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* to all students, faculty and staff at Earlham. We invited members of the community to gather in small groups in classrooms over lunch before the Convocation to talk about the book.

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I want to talk today about race matters at Earlham. I offer these remarks as a contribution to our ongoing conversation about diversity. Race is by no means the only aspect of diversity we should care about, but because of our nation's history, race is an unavoidable, relentlessly difficult, occasionally joyful issue that we must address. Racial prejudice is an unhealed wound that runs through the body of our nation.

As a starting point for talking together, I've urged us all to read, or re-read, W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk*. I hope you all received a copy and have had a chance to read at least some of it. I believe it is the most significant book yet written about race matters in the United States.

The idea of having us all read *The Souls of Black Folk* has its roots in an exchange about two years ago with Sharon Jones, who was then a new member of our English Department. Sharon gave a library talk about her wonderful, then recently-published anthology of African-American writings. I asked her, if you could get everyone at Earlham to read one book, what would it be? Without much hesitation, she said, *The Souls of Black Folk*. That would be pretty terrific, I remember thinking. Over this past summer, Sharon also gave me some advice and counsel on the discussion questions we distributed with the book. Sharon isn't responsible for any of this, but I do thank her.

Before going on, I also want to thank Kirsten Bohl and Darlena Rankin for working out the logistics of distributing books and reserving lunches. I want to thank Kathy Guyler, Ginger Scholl and others from Sodexo Marriott for providing the lunches under unusual circumstances. And I want to thank all of you who took advantage of the opportunity to discuss Du Bois over lunch.

I want to thank Tom Hamm, for answering several questions for me about Earlham's history. Thanks, too, to the dozen or so people who have started conversations with me about race over the past two or three weeks by suggesting something for me to read, or by asking if I was going to talk about some particular aspect of race. I could have written my remarks simply based on those conversations.

My remarks today will focus on issues of Black and White. I know race is much more complicated than that. There is much more to be said, known, understood by us all than I can possibly say here. You may find yourselves frustrated, wanting to say as you read this, "But it's more complicated than that."

And that is exactly what I hope. I urge you all to contribute to an understanding of race matters at Earlham, race matters in the United States, race matters in the world.



Du Bois published *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903, just about 100 years ago. Also published in 1903 were Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*, and Henry James' *The Ambassadors*. Films were in their infancy: audiences could be thrilled that year by a 12-minute, nine-scene film called *The Great Train Robbery*. Of course there was no television. And while scientists and engineers were experimenting with the possibilities of radio transmission, there were no radio stations. Telephones and electricity were just coming into broad use in some cities.

In 1903 there were cars, but just a few thousand in the U.S., and the Model T would not be available for another five years. By railroad, it was now possible to travel from New York to Chicago in 20 hours — much faster than ever before. It was the year after a streetcar line opened that could take an Earlhamite from the front gate to Indianapolis, right along National Road. And 1903 was the year of the Wright Brothers' first flight at Kitty Hawk.

In 1903, women had no vote under the federal constitution. There was no national law prohibiting child labor. Prolonged, violent labor strikes were frequently in the news. Teddy Roosevelt was president.

I mention these few glimpses of 1903 to remind you how dramatically our nation has changed in these last 100 years. We have plowed up and rebuilt, swept aside and replaced, moved on and left behind nearly everything. No job today bears much resemblance to any job then. Places of residence are different today. How we communicate and travel have been completely transformed. How we socialize, and how we are entertained: completely different.

But through all this change, all this innovation and remaking, the specter and the fact of racial injustice stays with us. Hardly anything could survive from one end of the century to the other, but racism could — and did.

I'm not saying that we have not, as a country, made any progress toward great racial justice. I'm not saying that the face of racism is unchanged. But many of you have told me over the past week, as you've been reading *The Souls of Black Folk*, how freshly the book reads, how much it speaks to our condition today. If Du Bois speaks to us today, it is because we still experience, today, the heart of what Du Bois wrote about.

In 1903 there were about just about nine million Blacks in the United States, in a total population of about 75 million. Two-thirds of the Black population lived in the south. Blacks mostly were farm workers, tenant farmers, and sharecroppers in rural areas. They were working exhausted land that, for the most part, they did

not own. There were perhaps 150,000 Black-owned farms in the south, as against one million White-owned farms. Du Bois writes with passion and insight about circumstances of life in the Black Belt, in Georgia — what he calls the Egypt of the Confederacy.

Today there are about 35 million Blacks in the United States, in a total population of about 275 million. Blacks comprise just over 12% of the total population. Most Blacks do not live in the south. Most live in urban areas. A relatively small percentage are engaged in farming. Were we writing today a portrait of Black life in America, as Du Bois did 100 years ago, we would not focus on Dougherty County, Georgia. We would focus on Detroit or Philadelphia or Kansas City.

Du Bois wrote *The Souls of Black Folk* just 38 years after the 13th Amendment finally made slavery illegal in the United States. Another 98 years has passed since then. We've had all those years. We've changed so much, remade nearly everything. But we have not remade the predicament of race.

Today about 11% of the White population of the United States lives below the poverty line, but over 26% of the Black population. Put another way, in these United States, a Black person is two and a half times as likely as a White person to live in poverty. Poverty is worse for children. Over 15% of White children live in poverty, but nearly 37% of Black children — more than a third. And money inequality is much more dramatic when we speak of wealth, not income. If we consider the median net worth (or total assets) of households, the net worth of the median Black household is less than a tenth of the median White household.

In 1903 we had never heard of AIDS; no one in the world was HIV positive. AIDS didn't come along until the 1980s, a century and a quarter after the end of slavery, a century and a quarter after we made a formal commitment to racial equality. By itself the virus takes no notice of skin color. So wouldn't the virus attack Blacks and Whites equally when it did arrive?

By no means. Today, in the United States, one in 3,000 White women is HIV positive, but one in 160 Black women. A Black woman is almost 19 times more likely than a White woman to be infected. The difference is less among men, but then men are much more likely to be HIV positive. One in 250 White men, today in the U.S., is HIV positive. But one in 50 Black men is. One in 50. Race inequality is so deeply imprinted on our society that it shapes the effect of nearly everything else.

At Earlham, our mission is to draw young women and men to the College for a transformative experience. We seek to widen your horizons and equip you better to make a difference in this world. With that mission, we must care about the life chances that young women and men have before we offer you an education. If something makes those life chances different before you arrive, we have an obligation to think about why those life chances are different, and about how we respond.

As she approaches adulthood, a teenager faces three broad possibilities. She can go on to college, she can go out into the workforce, or she can find her way into prison. What shadow does race lay upon those options?

Remember that Blacks, today, comprise just about 12% of the U.S. population. But Blacks make up over 43% of the prison population. Blacks are more than three times as likely to find themselves ensnared by prisons.

For those who go out into the workforce without going to college, unemployment is a key risk. Among those ages 20 to 24 today, about 6.5% of Whites, but nearly 17% of Blacks, are unemployed. That is, Black young adults are about two and a half times more likely than White young adults to find themselves unemployed. You may be thinking — and it's a good thought — perhaps education is the problem. Perhaps Black young adults are less likely than White young adults to have finished high school. And we know completing high school helps.

If we just limit ourselves to Black and White young adults who have finished high school, and have not gone on to college — roughly equal educational attainments — the unemployment rate looks better, but the racial gap remains. Just over 4% of young adult White high school graduates in the work force are unemployed, but 8.4% of young adult Black high school graduates.

We are making progress on narrowing the race gap in high school graduation rates. And we have made progress in narrowing the race gap in college-going rates. Today, about 60% of Black high school graduates are enrolled in college the next year, in comparison to about 68% of White high school graduates.

But I also need to add that these narrowing gaps in high school graduation and college-going rates may mask more significant differences in what students have actually learned by the end of high school. Black 17 year olds have average reading scores equal to those for the average of White 13 year olds. In both reading and math, the gaps between Black and White students narrowed somewhat during the 1970s and '80s, but widened again during the 1990s.



Let's jump from the national scene into Earlham's race saga about midway through the period of time that stretches from when *The Souls of Black Folk* was published to today.

Fifty years ago at Earlham, right after spring break, Grace Cunningham and Robert McAllester announced that they were going to be married after graduation. They were one of a half dozen couples to make that announcement. But in one important respect they were different: Robert McAllester was and is White, and Grace Cunningham was and is Black. (Grace Cunningham is also the daughter of the College's first Black male graduate, Clarence Cunningham, class of 1924, for whom the Cunningham Cultural Center is named.)

In 1952, the College had a policy against interracial dating. The two were called into the office of President Tom Jones. Jones and other College officials tried to persuade them that their proposed marriage was unwise, that they did not understand the difficulties and tribulations they would face, and that their plans would bring hard times to the College. When President Jones and the others could not persuade Grace Cunningham and Robert McAllester to change their plans, Robert McAllester was excluded from campus for the rest of the spring semester. He returned only in June to go through Commencement ceremonies. The faculty, the Board of Trustees and the alumni association all endorsed the president's handling of the situation.

In fact, the leadership of Earlham was internally conflicted about the matter. So, too was the faculty. The policy continued to be criticized from within and outside the College throughout the 1950s. A 1958 poll of the student body showed 82% opposed to the policy. And the policy against interracial dating was eliminated early in the 1960s.

Grace Cunningham and Robert McAllester did marry that spring 50 years ago, and I am happy to say they are married still. But they have never returned to the Earlham campus. The incident left a deep crease in their memories of the College, and in the memories of many of their classmates.

We cannot simply dismiss Tom Jones as a bigot. He had been president of Fisk University, an historically Black College, for two decades before coming to Earlham as president right after World War II. At Fisk he had been a very successful and very well-regarded president. If the Earlham Board of Trustees had any doubts about making Tom Jones president, the worry was that he would push too hard, too fast on race matters.

So how had we come to be in this place?



There is a race aspect to Earlham's beginnings that has to do with why there are Quakers in Indiana. In the early 19th century, Quakers left the Carolinas partly because they wanted new economic opportunities, but also because they wanted to leave slavery behind them. They came to Ohio and Indiana to start over, in a land where there was no slavery. In the years leading up to the Civil War, some Friends, including Levi Coffin, assisted escaping slaves through the Underground Railroad.

In the 1840s, Indiana Quakers established a college, Earlham, to provide an education for their children grounded in Quaker beliefs and testimonies. So was this college they founded committed to racial equality? I think we have to say: not wholeheartedly, for its first century and more. After the Civil War, Indiana Quakers did not sustain their concerns about race matters.

Earlham's first Black student was a man named Osborn Taylor, who attended in the 1880s but did not graduate. Other Black students attended from time to time, but we have kept little record of their being here. Almost certainly they did not live in the dorms or participate in social activities.

In 1899, Booker T. Washington (whom Du Bois criticizes vigorously) was invited to campus to give a lecture, and other Black speakers were occasionally invited. We know that in 1912 Elbert Russell, a distinguished and progressive-thinking professor of religion and philosophy, spoke at a Convocation about 'the race question.' We don't have a copy of his remarks, but the *Earlham Press* summary says the following: "After showing how seemingly impossible it is to give the two races equal rights, he showed that in the true spirit of Christianity, it should be done." On the other hand, campus publications from the first few decades of the century contain a number of articles that give voice to claims of White racial superiority.

During the 1920s there was some greater attention towards issues of racial equality at Earlham, some of the efforts encouraged by President David Edwards, some led by a faculty member, Clarence Pickett, who would go on to be, for many years, a highly respected Executive Secretary of the American Friends Service Committee. This was the era when Clarence Cunningham, the first Black graduate, was a student. Cunningham did live on campus, but he was excluded from Mask and Mantle, the student theater group. He was a member of the track team, but he had to find separate accommodations when the team traveled.

During the 1930s and early '40s, the College again grew more cautious on race questions. Interracial dating was discouraged, but there was no policy against it. After a few interracial dating incidents during World War II involving not just White and Black students, but also White and Japanese students, the College formally adopted a policy against interracial dating in 1944. Before the 1950s, Earlham often acquiesced to the wishes of all-White colleges by benching its few Black athletes during games and competitions.

If Earlham showed itself hesitant on a full commitment to racial equality, the College was also, in all these regards, more advanced than the communities around it, and more advanced than other colleges in Indiana. (Earlham still drew most of its students from Indiana.) At the time a number of Indiana colleges did not admit any Black students. In 1952, Earlham was unsure about how much it could be 'out front' of the society around it on race matters. The policy against interracial dating, I think we should say, had its roots in good intentions. About such good intentions, Du Bois says, "The problem of life is not the problem of the wicked" (p.135).

Attention to race matters at Earlham quickened in the 1960s, about the same time that attention to race matters quickened across the United States.

It was in the 1960s that Earlham first hired a Black faculty member, and the numbers of Black students began to grow, albeit slowly. By 1972, Blacks comprised about 6% of the student body. In 1970 we established the program that today is African and African American Studies. In 1973 we adopted an affirmative action policy in hiring, and in 1978 we established the Cunningham Cultural Center.

The 1980s and 1990s were decades of slow progress punctuated by several episodes of anger and frustration over the slow pace of change. Today, Blacks comprise about 11% of the student body, just a bit below the 12% or so that Blacks comprise of the total U.S. population. But Blacks make up only about 7% of the regular teaching faculty, perhaps 10% of the full-time administrative faculty, and 10% of the Board of Trustees. (I wish I had a good estimate on hourly staff, but I don't.)

I believe we are not satisfied at Earlham about where we are with regard to race matters, particularly with regard to adding African Americans to the teaching faculty. I do not believe we should be satisfied. I also want particularly to note here that, relative to their percentage in the U.S. population, we have been even less successful in drawing to Earlham students or faculty who are Hispanics, or Asian Americans, or Native Americans.

The dissatisfaction goes beyond numbers. It has to do with whether we welcome, in every way we can extend a welcome, Black students and faculty and staff warmly to Earlham. It has to do with whether we make everyone feel at home here. It has to do with whether, as a community and as an institution, we have made ourselves a place for everyone, having failed at that for many decades.



By what strategy should we try to make progress towards racial equality as a college? Or as a nation?

Du Bois' one extended discussion of national public policy is a consideration of the Freedmen's Bureau. This was a Reconstruction era agency intended to give a fresh start to freed slaves. The strategy, or at least the slogan, of the Freedmen's Bureau was "forty acres and a mule," but most freed Blacks never received either 40 acres or a mule. Du Bois is generous in his assessment of the failures of the Freedmen's Bureau. He praises the conception and the effort of many. He condemns, not with a broad brush, not everyone involved in the effort. "Its failures," he says, "were the result of bad local agents, the inherent difficulties of the work, and national neglect" (p. 22). I think we might say the same about many efforts toward racial justice today.

Du Bois says little about the Jim Crow laws that were being enacted across the south in the decade before and the decade after he wrote (and not only in the

south), laws that stripped Blacks of the newly-won right to vote, induced terror, stripped Blacks of opportunities to pursue justice through the courts, and bound them in debt peonage. Nor does Du Bois even mention the 1896 Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which gave legal solidity to the doctrine of "separate but equal" in schools, hospitals, restaurants, public transportation, hotels — nearly every aspect of public life. For decades, Jim Crow and the cruel hoax of "separate but equal" would stand athwart any chance of progress towards racial equality.

In 1909, six years after *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois was a key participant in the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The NAACP committed itself to using public advocacy and litigation to end segregation. But segregation was to remain the law of the land until 1954 (50 years after *The Souls of Black Folk*), with the landmark Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*.

In the 1950s and 1960s, a new energy towards racial justice began to sweep across this country, through local communities, through the hearts and souls of some extraordinary ordinary people, and eventually through the courts and the Congress. The Brown decision marked the beginning of the end for legal segregation, though it took years for its effects to be fully realized. In 1964 we passed the Civil Rights Act, and in 1965 a Voting Rights Act, recommitting ourselves, in effect, to the 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution adopted a century earlier. But ending segregation was not enough. Restoring the right to vote was not enough. By what strategy should we, as a nation, deal with the accumulated disadvantages of slavery and segregation?

For the past three decades, "affirmative action" has been the focus of effort and argument over national public policy towards racial justice. Should we take race into account in hiring decisions? In awarding contracts to vendors? In decisions about whom to admit to a college or a graduate program? And if so, how? Or should we use "race blind" criteria in hiring and awarding contracts and admissions? In the heat of argument, people often use the same terms to mean different things. What would it mean to "take race into account?" Are there any "race blind criteria" or are most criteria of "merit" infected by race? If race still deeply infects everything it touches in American society, how can we accurately assess the potential or merit of those who seek admission or apply for a job? Grades in school? SAT or GRE score? Recommendations from those we already know well, most of them White?

As a matter of federal policy today, affirmative action has become very swampy ground. Federal District and Appeals Courts have made rulings that flatly contradict one another. In two similar cases against the University of Michigan last year, one involving the undergraduate college and one the Law School, two judges in the same federal district made opposing decisions.

With regard to college admissions, the key Supreme Court decision is the *Bakke* case from 1978. There were six separate opinions issued by the nine members of the Supreme Court in *Bakke*. With Justice Lewis Powell casting the decisive vote in that case, a bare five-to-four majority of the Court ruled that race could be taken into account. Powell wrote that there could be no quotas and no set-asides for African Americans or other those from other racial minorities. But he also affirmed that race could be a 'plus' factor in admissions, weighed along with other factors. For a quarter century since *Bakke*, we have been waiting for a further Supreme Court case on affirmative action. Perhaps it will come this year or next. Few who favor affirmative action in some form in hiring or admissions is optimistic about how this particular Supreme Court might rule.

Why should this matter to Earlham? As a private college, can we not do as we please in hiring and admissions? If we want to increase the numbers of African Americans in our student body or our faculty or staff, can't we just do it? That's a harder question than you might think. *Bakke* or any future Supreme Court decision on affirmative action has *some* applicability to Earlham because we receive and distribute to students significant amounts of federal funds for financial aid, and that makes us subject to federal policy. Thus it matters to us at Earlham what the Supreme Court says about race and affirmative action.



Earlham adopted an affirmative action policy in 1973. Briefly put, it says we will put extra effort into advertising faculty positions to Blacks and other ethnic minorities. Further, it says we will put extra effort into making sure minority candidates are given the fullest and fairest possible consideration through the search process. At the end of the search, our policy says we will hire the best person; race will confer no advantage in the final decision. This is a policy fully consistent, I should add, with current Supreme Court rulings.

This policy is perplexing because it asks us to think in race terms at some points in the decision process only to stop thinking in race terms at the final decision. It is a policy that breeds frustration because we are regularly reminded of ways the wider, racially-shaped environment constantly undercuts our efforts. There are simply very few Black Ph.D.s in some fields, for example, and there is little we can do about that. And it is a paradoxical policy because it asks us to think in race terms to get to a place where race no longer matters. No one wants us to admit students or hire faculty simply because they are Black. We are all trying to look through the distorting lens of race to see merit and potential in human terms.

After nearly 30 years with this policy, it is important that we ask ourselves as a community two questions. First, does this policy embody our best intentions about how race should matter in hiring? And second, is this policy working?

I believe that yes, the policy does embody our best intentions about how race should matter in hiring. But I do not believe the policy is working as well as we hope. I am impatient about the progress we have not yet made towards greater racial diversity in the faculty. If we continue as we have, I think our progress towards diversity will continue to be too slow. As we develop a plan for diversity at Earlham, I would like us all to think about where Earlham should be with regard to affirmative action.

As we have this discussion, I think we need to recognize that the national debate about affirmative action long ago ceased to be making any constructive contribution to our thinking about race. The debate is heated, polarized, often rancorous. The outcome of the debate is important. But the debate is now so stylized and confused that it is making no positive contribution to greater shared understanding of race matters. We can do better at Earlham, but only if we really talk with one another.

I believe we should continue to pursue affirmative action as national policy. I believe at Earlham we must find ways to make pursuing affirmative action more effective. And I believe we must find other ways to renew or begin a national conversation about how and why race matters in the United States. If we abandon affirmative action, we will be a nation with an unhealed racial wound, and no strategy or policy for healing it.



One thing we know better today than Du Bois could possibly have known in 1903 has to do with the biological foundation of race. I have been talking this afternoon about 'Black' and 'White,' using these terms straightforwardly, and I think most of you have known what I am talking about.

As our understanding of genetics has deepened, as we have learned to read the human genome, we have come to understand this deep and arresting insight. *There is no biological reality to the idea of race.* At the level of the building blocks of human beings, there is no substance to the idea of race.

Quakers believe that there is 'that of God in every person.' Many other religions and faiths express the same idea in somewhat different terms. Where race is concerned, we have taken this religious principle to mean something like the following: 'Whatever biological differences there are between a person of one race and a person of another race, those differences are of no importance to God.' The concept of race presented itself as a biological category, which we said was irrelevant spiritually. But now we *also* know that the idea of race is a *bogus* biological category, a profoundly wounding misunderstanding of what it means to be human. The concept of race has no material foundation, *and* it has no spiritual foundation.

That does not mean the concept of race has evaporated or disappeared. Our understanding of race has been historically and socially constructed. Thus, we still see one another in terms of race, as mistaken and harmful a concept or lens for seeing one another as race may be. So how should we understand 'race'?

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois talks of the double consciousness of African Americans. It is one of his central themes. "One ever feels his two-ness," he says, "an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (p. 2). This double consciousness, Du Bois argues, can seem like weakness, but it is not. It is instead, really, "the contradiction of double aims" (p. 3).

Du Bois urges Blacks to understand their two-ness, their double consciousness, to synthesize them into something stronger and richer — "the ideal of human brotherhood" (p. 7). An American? A Negro? "All these ideals must be melted and welded into one" (p. 6). He speaks of "the ideal of fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro, not in opposition to or contempt for other races, but rather in large conformity to the greater ideals of the American Republic, in order that some day on American soil two world races may give to each those characteristics both so sadly lack" (p. 7).

In *The Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois offered Whites a clearer, more perceptive understanding of the facts of race in the United States than they previously had. He does not directly make suggestions, however, about how Whites should think of themselves in racial terms. White people need a more lucid understanding, too — a more complex understanding. If Black folk are vulnerable to conflicting understandings of themselves, White folk are vulnerable to simply taking for granted the many privileges they (we) enjoy by virtue of being White. It's like wearing elevator shoes and not realizing that's what makes you taller than most. Or like having an endless supply of "get out of jail free" or "go directly to Go" cards without knowing you are constantly cashing them in. White skin privilege is an undeserved benefit that relentlessly sustains the pervasive environment of racial inequality: think again of all the gaps in income, education and the like I mentioned earlier.



Du Bois believes we need several things to make progress in matters of race. The right to vote must be restored to Blacks and used effectively. The civil rights of Blacks must be restored and respected. Blacks must have productive, fairly paid work. Youth must be educated according to their abilities. "Work, culture, liberty, — all these we need, not singly but together, not successively but together, each growing and aiding each" (p. 7).

While it cannot bear the whole burden, Du Bois has particularly high expectations for what education can contribute. Du Bois rejects, with great vigor, Booker T. Washington's then-influential idea that Blacks should concentrate simply on education for manual occupations. In this strategy of Washington's, Du Bois sees submission of Blacks to Whites, and he sees acquiescence to the alleged inferiority of Blacks.

Du Bois insists there must be opportunities for college education for Black youths. Higher education is needed to prepare teachers for the education of Black children. And higher education is needed to prepare the next generation of leaders for Black Americans.

The education that Du Bois believes is needed is a liberal education, the kind of education that we offer at Earlham. "The function of the university," he writes, "is not simply to teach breadwinning, or to furnish teachers for the public schools, or to be the centre of polite society; it is, above all, to be the organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life, an adjustment which forms the secret of civilization" (p. 52-3). Du Bois wants an education invested with "a concern for the world in which we live and for improving human society." (That's from our own mission statement.) It is an education determined to realize for men (we add 'and women'), "both Black and White, the broadest possibilities of life, to seek the better and the best, and to spread with their own hands the Gospel of Sacrifice." (That's from Du Bois, again, p. 51-2.)

Colleges and universities are where color-prejudice can be overcome "by the breadth and broadening of human reason, by catholicity of taste and culture" (p. 56). Colleges and universities are where the predicament of double consciousness can and will be understood and mastered. And colleges and universities are where an awareness of undeserved White skin privilege can be understood and rejected.

Du Bois urges support of three dozen or so Black colleges, for whose founding he credits the Freedmen's Bureau. In 1903, few Black students were being accepted at any White colleges. Today we expect all colleges and universities to contribute to broader understanding across the color-line.

In such a liberal education, where does 'race' belong, especially when we see clearly that 'race' has no honest, deep grounding in the biological constitution of human beings?

In two important ways I believe we need to find a place for the concept of race in the curriculum of the liberal arts and sciences.

First, we need to learn and teach how undeserved privilege can be constructed and maintained for the advantage of some and the misery of many others, undermining the promise of human liberty and equality. Over the past few hundred years, not only in this country but across the globe, race provides the most striking examples of longstanding, unwarranted domination of one group by another.

The second way race should find a place in the liberal arts curriculum arises from the insight that human beings build communities and cultures out of the circumstances in which they find themselves, however unfair or undeserved. Race is a bogus biological category for understanding human beings. Slavery and systematic prejudice based on race are deeply wrong. Nevertheless, Blacks and other racially stigmatized groups have built noble communities and culture out of these ugly and unfair predicaments. These experiences of community and these manifestations of culture are well worth our knowing.

"Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto," wrote Terence (Publius Terentius Afer), a Roman playwright born an African slave in the second century B.C. ("Being human, nothing human is alien to me.") We learn more about the possibilities of being human if we gather into our course of study all the cultural experiences that make up our world. We educate more effectively if we invite students to understand the cultural experiences that connect most closely to their families and their future possibilities.

Du Bois makes a striking statement by beginning each chapter with both a fragment of European poetry and a fragment of a 'sorrow song,' an African American spiritual. Du Bois shows us he has mastered an old canon and introduces us to a new one. He shows us both are worth knowing, and he shows us they can speak to one another.



I've been working my way towards voicing these propositions:

First, race matters because, as a nation, we cheated on our founding ideals by systematically denying liberty and equality on the basis of race. And thus race matters because still today the distributions of good things — money, education, employment, health, for example — are systematically biased by race.

Second, race is a bogus category biologically, yet it matters a great deal because each of us has ascribed to us a nearly indelible racial identity that has been socially and historically constructed.

Third, race matters because human beings of many races have struggled against and risen above the predicaments of racial categorizing to realize great triumphs and accomplishments in every variety of human endeavor. Those triumphs and accomplishments are worth knowing, and can only be fully known, by understanding the race-saturated terrain on which they were won.

Fourth, race needs to matter to the White members of our community as much as it has been made to matter to the Black, Hispanic, Asian American and Native American members of our community. The White members of our community need to break out of unconscious acquiescence into self-conscious awareness of the undeserved privileges that attach to being seen as White.

Fifth, an education in the liberal arts and sciences is the best strategy for dealing with the double consciousness which Du Bois describes as undermining the self-confidence of Blacks. And an education in the liberal arts and sciences is the best strategy for coming to terms with Whiteness. No one should be seen, simply or primarily, as a White person or a Black person. Among our goals in liberal education are to free each individual as much as we can from having a racial identity ascribed to him, and to equip each individual, so far as possible, to shape her own identity, herself, from the full range of cultural resources which human beings have fashioned.

And sixth, for decades, Earlham had only a half-hearted commitment to racial justice. Today I believe we are making a whole-hearted commitment, but we need clearer thinking and continuing honest dialogue with one another to give force and effect to that whole-hearted commitment. We need strategies we can unite in supporting that will be honest and effective on the tricky terrain of race.

"The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line," says Du Bois. What shall we say of the twenty-first?



I want to close by making one specific proposal. I've stressed today that I believe we need to talk about race as a community — all of us, not just some of us. At lunch today we had one such opportunity, but we need others. And there are other important topics about which we could use opportunities to talk as a whole community — students, faculty and staff. For the past several years, we've found ourselves wondering what is the best way to observe Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Some have argued it should be a day off. Others have urged that we honor the memory of Martin Luther King Jr. by having 'a day on,' going about our regular activities of teaching and learning. I propose that we observe King's birthday each year by making it a day that we use to talk about important matters facing our community — like race.

Citations within this speech are to Du Bois, W.E.B., *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chicago: A.C. McClurg; Reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1994.



About Earlham

Earlham College is an undergraduate, residential college providing the highest quality education in the liberal arts, including the sciences. Drawing students from across the United States and many foreign countries, the education it provides is shaped by the distinctive perspectives of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

The *Earlham School of Religion* is a Quaker seminary that prepares men and women of all branches of Friends and other traditions and faiths for leadership that empowers and equips the ministry of others.

Both Earlham College and the Earlham School of Religion are located in Richmond, Indiana. Both are deeply grounded in the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). These Quaker roots are not just history or heritage but a living, vital connection. The Institute for Quaker Studies, which serves both Earlham College and the Earlham School of Religion, seeks to integrate our Quaker resources both on campus and in relation to the wider Religious Society of Friends.

Conner Prairie is a living history museum located in Fishers, north of Indianapolis. First established by Eli Lilly, Conner Prairie is now organized as a wholly owned subsidiary of Earlham. It provides a variety of authentic, unique and entertaining educational experiences that show how America developed.

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