

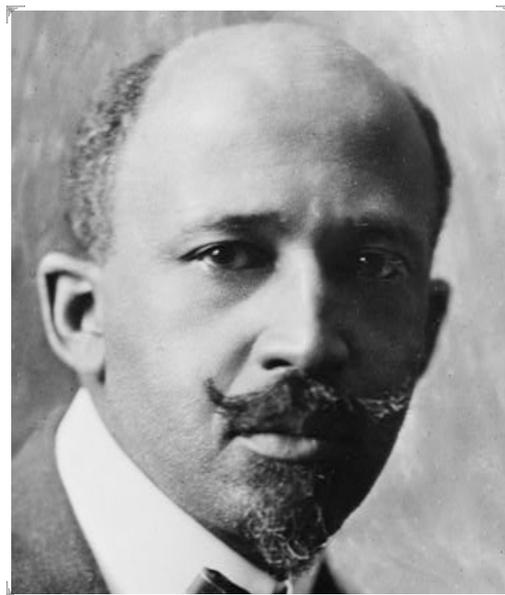
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MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

The Centennial Address delivered by Nobel Laureate Dr. Martin Luther King at Carnegie Hall in New York City, February 23, 1968. The occasion was the International Cultural Evening sponsored by FREEDOMWAYS Magazine on the 100th birthday of Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois and launching an "International Year" (1968) honoring his life and works. This is the last major speech of Dr. King before his assassination.

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HONORING DR. DU BOIS



SPEECH BY
**DR. MARTIN LUTHER
KING JR.**

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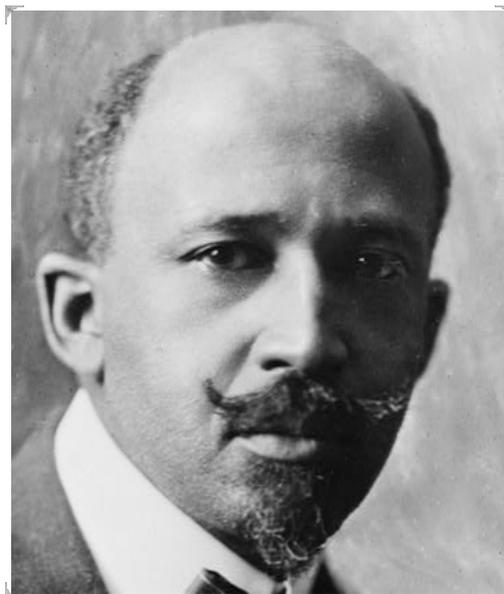
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TONIGHT we assemble here to pay tribute to one of the most remarkable men of our time.

Dr. Du Bois was not only an intellectual giant exploring the frontiers of knowledge, he was in the first place a teacher. He would have wanted his life to teach us something about our tasks of emancipation.

One idea he insistently taught was that black people have been kept in oppression and deprivation by a poisonous fog of lies that depicted them as inferior, born deficient and deservedly doomed to servitude to the grave. So assiduously has this poison been injected into the mind of America that its disease has infected not only whites but many Negroes. So long as the lie was believed the brutality and criminality of conduct toward the Negro was easy for the conscience to bear. The twisted logic ran if the black man was inferior he was not oppressed—his place in society was appropriate to his meager talent and intellect.

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repression of our movement, we will confront it, for we have done this before. If this means scorn or ridicule, we will embrace it, for that is what America's poor now receive. If it means jail, we accept it willingly, for the millions of poor already are imprisoned by exploitation and discrimination.

Dr. Du Bois would be in the front ranks of the peace movement today. He would readily see the parallel between American support of the corrupt and despised Thieu-Ky regime and Northern support to the Southern slave masters in 1876. The CIA scarcely exaggerates, indeed it is surprisingly honest, when it calculates for Congress that the war in Vietnam can persist for one hundred years. People deprived of their freedom do not give up—Negroes have been fighting more than a hundred years, and even if the date of full emancipation is uncertain, what is explicitly certain is that the struggle for it will endure.

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. 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

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Negroes have heavy tasks today. We were partially liberated and then re-enslaved. We have to fight again on old battlefields, but our confidence is greater, our vision is clearer, and our ultimate victory surer because of the contributions a militant, passionate black giant left behind him.

Dr. Du Bois has left us but he has not died. The spirit of freedom is not buried in the grave of the valiant. He will be with us when we go to Washington in April to demand our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

We have to go to Washington because they have declared an armistice in the war on poverty while squandering billions to expand a senseless, cruel, unjust war in Vietnam. We will go there, we will demand to be heard, and we will stay until the administration responds. If this means forcible

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There could scarcely be a more suitable person for such a monumental task. First of all he was himself unsurpassed as an intellect and he was a Negro. But beyond this he was passionately proud to be black and finally he had not only genius and pride but he had the indomitable fighting spirit of the valiant.

To pursue his mission, Dr. Du Bois gave up the substantial privileges a highly educated Negro enjoyed living in the North. Though he held degrees from Harvard and the University of Berlin, though he had more academic credentials than most Americans, black or white, he moved South where a majority of Negroes then lived. He deliberately chose to share their daily abuse and humiliation. He could have offered himself to the white rulers and exacted substantial tribute for selling his genius. There were few like him, Negro or white. He could have amassed riches and honors and lived in material splendor and applause from the powerful and important men of his time. Instead, he lived part of his creative life in the South-most of it in modest means and some of it in

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poverty, and he died in exile, praised sparingly and in many circles ignored.

But he was an exile only to the land of his birth. He died at home in Africa among his cherished ancestors, and he was ignored by a pathetically ignorant America but not by history.

History cannot ignore W. E. B. Du Bois. Because history has to reflect truth and Dr. Du Bois was a tireless explorer and a gifted discoverer of social truths. His singular greatness lay in his quest for truth about his own people. There were very few scholars who concerned themselves with honest study of the black man and he sought to fill this immense void. The degree to which he succeeded discloses the great dimensions of the man.

Yet he had more than a void to fill. He had to deal with the army of white propagandists-the myth-makers of Negro history. Dr. Du Bois took them all on in battle. It would be impossible to sketch the whole range of his intellectual contributions. Back in the nineteenth century he laid out a program of 100 years of study of problems affecting American Negroes and worked tirelessly to implement it.

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The educated Negro who is not really part of us and the angry militant who fails to organize us have nothing in common with Dr. Du Bois. He exemplified black power in achievement and he organized black power in action. It was no abstract slogan to him.

We cannot talk of Dr. Du Bois without recognizing that he was a radical all of his life. Some people would like to ignore the fact that he was a Communist in his later years. It is worth noting that Abraham Lincoln warmly welcomed the support of Karl Marx during the Civil War and corresponded with him freely. In contemporary life the English-speaking world has no difficulty with the fact that Sean O'Casey was a literary giant of the twentieth century and a Communist or that Pablo Neruda is generally considered the greatest living poet though he also served in the Chilean Senate as a Communist. It is time to cease muting the fact that Dr. Du Bois was a genius and chose to be a Communist. Our irrational, obsessive anti-communism has led us into too many quagmires to be retained as if it were a mode of scientific thinking.

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And yet, with all his pride and spirit he did not make a mystique out of blackness. He was proud of his people, not because their color endowed them with some vague greatness but because their concrete achievements in struggle had advanced humanity, and he saw and loved progressive humanity in all its hues, black, white, yellow, red, and brown.

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.

This life style of Dr. Du Bois is the most important quality this generation of Negroes needs to emulate.

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Against such odds Dr. Du Bois produced two enduring classics before the twentieth century. His *Suppression of the African Slave-Trade*, written in 1896, is Volume I in the Harvard Historical Studies. His study *The Philadelphia Negro*, completed in 1899, is still used today. Illustrating the painstaking quality of his scientific method, to do this work Dr. Du Bois personally visited and interviewed 5,000 people.

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Returning to the United States from abroad, he found his pioneering agitation for Negro studies was bearing fruit and a beginning was made to broaden Negro higher education. He threw himself into the task of raising the intellectual level of this work. Much later, in 1940, he participated in the establishment of the first Negro scholarly publication, *Phylon*. At the same time he stimulated Negro colleges to collaborate through annual conferences to increase their effectiveness and elevate the quality of their academic studies.

But these activities, enough to be the life work for ten men, were far from the sum of his achievements. In the six years between 1935 and 1941 he produced the monumental seven-hundred-page volume on *Black Reconstruction in America*, at the same time writing many articles and essays. *Black*

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Dr. Du Bois *the man* needs to be remembered today when despair is all too prevalent. In the years he lived and fought, there was far more justification for frustration and hopelessness, and yet his faith in his people never wavered. His love and faith in Negroes permeate every sentence of his writings and every act of his life. Without these deeply rooted emotions his work would have been arid and abstract. With them his deeds were a passionate storm that swept the filth of falsehood from the pages of established history.

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Dr. Du Bois confronted this powerful structure of historical distortion and dismantled it. He virtually, before anyone else and more than anyone else, demolished the lies about Negroes in their most important and creative period of history. The truths he revealed are not yet the property of all Americans but they have been recorded and arm us for our contemporary battles.

In *Black Reconstruction* Dr. Du Bois dealt with the almost universally accepted concept that civilization virtually collapsed in the South during Reconstruction because Negroes had a measure of political power. Dr. Du Bois marshalled irrefutable evidence that, far from collapsing, the Southern economy was recovering in these years. Within five years the cotton crop had been restored, and in the succeeding five years had exceeded pre-war levels. At the same time other economic activity had ascended so rapidly the rebirth of the South was almost completed.

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With the completion of his book *Black Reconstruction*, despite its towering contributions, despite his advanced age, Dr. Du Bois was still not ready to accept a deserved rest in peaceful retirement. His dedication to freedom drove him on as relentlessly in his seventies as it did in his twenties. He had already encompassed three careers. Beginning as a pioneer sociologist, he had become an activist to further mass organization. The activist

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